

CONNECTIONS

FALL 2001

FINGERPRINTING GOD?

I felt guilty about it, I admit, but I was less than thrilled about attending the prayer retreat that was planned for my leadership team at work. Who could be against prayer, after all? So I smiled obligingly, agreed that it would be a wonderful time away, and went to the retreat. It was the right thing to do.

But I had a bit of a chip on my shoulder about it, and my attitude was slightly cynical. I was at a spiritually dry place at the time and really wasn't expecting much from God. In fact, it seemed to me that he had singled me out as the one person he planned to ignore. I was sounding a little whiny spiritually, even to myself, but it seemed like a vicious cycle. Pray. Silence. Emptiness. Pray. Silence. Emptiness.

My attitude didn't improve when the retreat started with glowing stories of answered prayer, miraculous healing, and the outpouring of God's blessing just because people prayed. That only contributed to my sense of aloneness and isolation from him. Hadn't I prayed too? Why was there only stony silence from God? Why did God have it in for me? Things weren't getting better as the time went on.

I was grateful when we were each given an assignment to work on alone, and I shuffled off to a quiet spot to contemplate God's fingerprints in my life. That was the assignment, to look over the past X amount of time in our lives and ministry, and write down where we saw God working. It seemed like an ironic thing to do, considering my spiritual dryness and sense of being abandoned by God.

But in that quiet place, reading the words of the psalm we'd been given to reflect on, suddenly God became very real. Instead of seeing all the losses of my life, all the pain and brokenness, all that hadn't happened the way I had planned and desired, I saw God. And I saw his fingerprints all over my life. I saw he had left his indelible mark on my soul.

His plan has been very different from mine. I never would have planned my life as it has been unfolding. Some of my life circumstances are the result of my own

I will not forget you! See, I have engraved you on the palms of my hands.

God,
Isaiah 49:15b,16a

sin. Daily I live with the painful reality of the price we pay for choices we willingly, even defiantly, make. I also live with the reality of other people's sin and how their choices impact my life. And because I know that God can—and sometimes does—intervene and work miracles in situations just like mine, I have at times become angry because he hasn't changed what I know he could.

But in this spiritual desert, in this imposed-on-me prayer retreat, God showed me his fingerprints. His plan—not mine—has shaped my spiritual journey.

He used my brokenness to give hope to others. He pushed me to grow and take charge of my life when I didn't want to. He brought people into my life I would never have shared God's love with if I had planned my life myself. I have learned spiritual lessons one can only learn when there's nowhere else to look but up. I have a deeper understanding of—and conviction about extending to others—the gift of grace. God's plan for my life has been good. Not painless by any means, but good. His fingerprints are all over my life, and he wants me to make no mistake about that.

My story isn't finished yet. God's hand will continue to shape my life. He uses the convicting power of his Word, earnest prayer, circumstances, people, my brokenness, and even my spiritual dryness to show me he knows exactly what he is doing. I can trust him.

I'm grateful God hangs on to me when I'm in the desert spiritually. It isn't easy to lead from that position, but it is precisely then that I am most aware that it is God leading and not I. I'm grateful he works in spite of me. And I'm grateful he showed me clearly that his fingerprints are all over my life.

You will soon be facing a new ministry year. Some of you have already started it. Are you spiritually fortified for it, or are you leading from a spiritual desert? Have you reflected on God's fingerprints in your life? If not, take some time alone with him and do so. Know he will never abandon you, even in the toughest of life's circumstances. His plan is perfect. Look for his fingerprints and let them comfort you.

Betty Veldman, Director of Small Group Ministries



Coffee Break



Small Groups



Story Hour
Little Lambs

VISION FOR YOUR COFFEE BREAK IS KEY

Whether this is your first season of Coffee Break or your fifteenth, vision will be the key to a successful season. Vision is what drives what we do. Without it we have no measure of how well we're doing.

What is your vision? If you're truly Coffee Break, your vision should be to reach out into your community and draw women into a personal, vital, growing relationship to Jesus Christ through inductive Bible study. Once you establish that vision, you need to communicate it.



COMMUNICATE VISION TO YOUR LEADERS

An excellent way to do that is by getting them to a workshop. This fall a newly revised leadership training workshop is available. Though the same basic elements are covered, it will be done in a new way and can be tailored especially for you.



COMMUNICATE VISION TO YOUR SUPPORTERS

A new promotional Coffee Break video is perfect for sharing with your leaders, your congregation or other supporters. It is available free of charge or on loan. It also shares the vision for Coffee Break and tells the story of how God changes lives through Coffee Break.

Start your year out right. Pray for God to cement YOUR vision and plan your year around it.

Betty Veldman, Director of Small Group Ministries

LOVING JEAN

I went to a funeral yesterday. She was only 45.

If you would have seen her on the street, she was the kind of person you would probably avoid looking in the eyes. She was not com-

ely, her weight obscuring the person she was. She never missed Coffee Break, (except for the times her fragile health got in the way). Every week she sat on the front porch of her government-complex home, waiting for her ride to Coffee Break. Regardless of the weather, Jean was ready. Her faithful ride-giver told us that no matter how she tried to convince Jean to wait inside, Jean insisted upon sitting out on the porch. She was afraid her ride-giver would think she wasn't coming and drive on by.

As we passed by Jean's parents to give our condolences, the mother looked up at the four of us from Coffee Break, and with tears streaming down her cheeks said, "Jean told me that it was because of Coffee Break that she accepted Jesus into her heart." Our hearts danced with joy! One of us put words to what we all were thinking: "We needed to hear that. Sometimes we wonder if a person actually responds, as they don't always tell us."

As you gear up for your Coffee Break season I know there are some of you who wonder if anyone ever "gets the message." Oh dear women, do not lose heart! God's Word NEVER returns empty. You have no idea how many lives you touch when you

simply love the "Jeans" of this world. Your hug, your smile, your time to drive her to a Bible study are all touches that could have eternity tied to them.

Rejoice that someday in heaven you may meet one of these Coffee Break ladies about whom you wondered if they ever responded to God. Labor in the harvest, for it is ripe. Do not lose heart!

Mary Werkhoven, Small Group Ministry Representative, Pacific Northwest

You have no idea how many lives you touch when you simply love the "Jeans" of this world.

DIRECTORS' REMINDER

Be sure to ask us to add the names of your new leaders to the *Connections* mailing list. The preferred way to send names and addresses is by email, jordanm@crcna.org. Please also include the name of your church.

The reverse is also true. Be sure to ask us to delete the names of your outgoing leaders. We do not remove names from the *Connections* mailing list unless you, the director, or the person herself makes the request. Our list has grown to over 10,000. Here's where we need your help. Think back over the past five years and email or mail Marjo Jordan the names of past leaders you think could be on the list and should be deleted. We appreciate your assistance in keeping costs down. ☕



"Where the river flows, everything will live," Ezekiel 47:9b

SMALL GROUP EVANGELISM CONFERENCE FOR WOMEN

WHO:

Hundreds of women who lead a variety of evangelistic small groups

WHAT:

Small Group Evangelism Conference for Women

WHERE:

Banks of the Mississippi River, St. Paul, Minnesota

WHEN:

Friday through Sunday, July 12-14, 2002

WHY:

- To rekindle a passion for loving and reaching unsaved people.
- To worship and glorify God.
- To learn new methods and concepts that equip women for small group ministry.
- To warmly welcome and care for small group leaders
- To deepen relationships and create new friendships.
- To energize and empower leaders to serve.

Come share the vision for the 2002 Small Group Evangelism Conference for Women. Under the guidance of co-directors Lois Hoogeveen and Jayne Termaat, the conference leadership team and supporting task teams are committed to creating a caring community that is sensitive to those attending and glorifying to God. You won't want to miss it!

MAKING AN IMPRINT

It's about to start all over again—Story Hour, Little Lambs, and nursery care. Are you ready to make an imprint on the lives of children and families?

Each year we celebrate stories of how God has changed the lives of children and their parents through this ministry. There's the story of a grandma who provided loving care in the nursery to a little girl. Several years later her mother returned and said, "Remember me? It's because of you that I'm now a Christian. If you hadn't been there for my daughter, I would not have been able to attend Coffee Break." Or there's the story of a little boy. His fascination and love for Story Hour kept his mom coming to Coffee Break, which led to their attending church services, which led to small group relationships in which his dad crossed the line of faith and accepted Christ into his life!

These are true stories, but I haven't mentioned any names because they have been repeated many, many times. Children's ministry does make a difference! God has a passion for reaching children and their families with his love. And YOU are an important part of what God wants to do in the next year.

Before you get bogged down with tasks and "to do" lists, take time to pray. Pray that God will allow you to plant seeds of truth and love, and that his Spirit will allow them to take root and grow. Pray that God will bless you as you lead, and that the fingerprints the children leave on your heart will help you grow more with childlike faith and wonder. Pray for the family each child represents, for they also are your mission field!

Pray, get ready, get set, go! May God work through you to leave his imprint.

Diane Dykgraaf, Story Hour/Little Lambs Specialist



Children between the ages of 5 and 13 have a 32 percent probability of accepting Jesus Christ as Savior. Between ages 14-18 the probability is 4 percent. Above age 18 it's 6 percent.

George Barna



PRECIOUS FINGERPRINTS

Recently we had an opportunity to vacation with our granddaughter Emily, who delights in her reflection in mirrors and left a good share of fingerprints stamped on the big one in the dining room. When she left, I was reluctant to wash them off because they were a precious reminder that she had been there and that she lives deeply in our hearts. We are thus reminded of God, who deeply loves us and looks to see where we leave our fingerprints—fingerprints in our homes, at our jobs, in our relationships, our world around us and the world at large where our touch has made a difference. God looks at our fingerprints and loves us.

To remind us of how precious we are to him, he gives us children—in our families, our lives, and in our community. He gives us children, and he gives us delight in their small fingerprints, which are, indeed, the touch of his love on our hearts.

Peg DeBoer, Small Group Ministry Representative, Alberta, Saskatchewan

FINGERPRINT IDEA

Read Peg DeBoer's short article, "Precious Fingerprints," in a church service, during a children's sermon, for a Coffee Break Sunday or even for next Mother's Day. Play or sing the song, "Fingerprints," by Mary Rice Hopkins as children come forward to create chalk hands on a banner. This could also be done at a program for your Coffee Break/Story Hour/Little Lambs. The moms (grandmas and great grandmas) will love it!

"Fingerprints" music is available from Big Steps 4 U Music, PO Box 362, Montrose, CA, 91021.

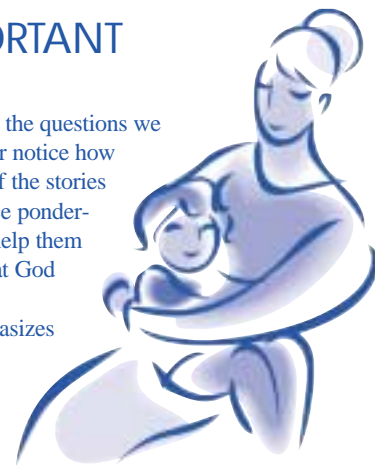


¿QUESTIONS MORE IMPORTANT THAN ANSWERS?

More important than the answers we give, are the questions we ask a child. Look at the master teacher. Ever notice how often Jesus asked a great question? Think of the stories he told and how he would leave his audience pondering a question that, in the long run, would help them understand what God desired for them, what God desired for us.

Elisa Morgan, from MOPS International emphasizes how asking and answering questions are such an important part of the process in a preschool child's learning experience.

In Story Hour and Little Lambs we get the job of asking the important questions that point children to Jesus. It is our goal to help children think about the truths of God and apply them to their life. Be ready, of course, to accept and delight in their preschool answers.



Diane Dykgraaf

RESOURCES

Order online at www.FaithAliveResources.org or call 1-800-333-8300.

HELPING KIDS INCLUDE KIDS WITH DISABILITIES

Barb Newman

This book provides practical suggestions for helping groups of children understand and welcome a child with a disability. \$19.95^{US}/28.95^{CDN} (#116010CT).

FROM THE DARKEST NIGHT Meditations for Abuse Survivors

Melanie Jansen

These meditations address the painful questions abuse survivors may have about God and the church. Includes original artwork by the author. (#160485CT)



Story Hour
Little Lambs

STORY HOUR

idea share



Coffee Break

PRAY FIRST

Sometimes it's the little things that make a big difference in people's lives. This practical, helpful resource gives wonderful ideas for connecting you with people in your community through prayer and random acts of kindness. It's an excellent resource for beginning your Coffee Break season (Christian Women United).

LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF

Blessing Your Neighborhood through Love and Prayer

Mary Lance V. Sisk

\$3.00^{US}/4.35^{CDN} (#230010CT)

GETTING THE WORD OUT

1. Use the new **Coffee Break post cards as an invitation**. Send a few to all the women who attended last year and ask them to give (or mail) these cards with a personal note to their acquaintances. There's even room to write a short line on the front, along the bottom of the post card, such as "Take a Break!" or



"You're Invited!" U.S. leaders, the cost of a postcard plus a 21-cent stamp totals 49-cents. Canadian leaders, your cost is 87-cents including postage.

Coffee Break Postcards in pads of 25.

#152065 Traditional View

\$6.95^{US}/10.10^{CDN}

#152066 Contemporary View

\$6.95^{US}/10.10^{CDN}

2. Another idea is to use the **post cards in a bulk mailing**. Carole Pettijohn of Grandville, MI, suggests using a Brother multi-function printer with the toner cartridge instead of a heat press so the ink doesn't smear. She ran them individually.

3. Pay for an **ad in the "personals" section** of the newspaper: "Looking for women who want to discover what Scripture has to say to them in 2001. Low-key setting, warmth, care, coffee, no previous Scripture knowledge necessary. Call Coffee Break Director ____."

4. Head for the nearby park on a warm day and **give away helium balloons** to children. Attach Story Hour/Little Lambs information to the balloons and take Coffee Break brochures along to hand to the moms. Invitations don't get much easier than this!

5. In Caledonia, MI, the Coffee Break group planned to have Story Hour kids on a float in the 4th of July parade. Adults would walk along side and **pass out refrigerator magnets**

advertising the times of their Coffee Break and Story Hour and nursery. Think how this could work in a Labor Day parade.

6. **Download logos** for Coffee Break, Story Hour and Small Groups at www.coffeebreakministries.org.



Coffee Break



Story Hour Little Lambs



Small Groups

BRING YOUR OWN COFFEE MUG

At a retreat she led in California last year, Karen O'Conner of Mount Soledad Presbyterian Church was impressed as each woman, holding her favorite coffee mug or tea cup, introduced herself with openers such as, "My daughter made this for me when she was in Kindergarten... On our honeymoon, my husband gave me this coffee cup... My great-great grandmother..." The instructions were to take along a favorite cup and its story, a "Show-and-Tell" of sorts. This icebreaker allowed the women to learn a little something special about each other, plus they drank from their cups, saving on the cost of paper products. This



could work for your first Coffee Break leader's group or even on a neighborhood invitation flyer. Just be prepared for those who arrive without a mug; be ready to

say, "Well, if you're like me, you may have forgotten your coffee cup..." and then describe the cup you *would have* brought.

NEWS THROUGH A CHRISTIAN EYE

TNN and the Odyssey network air "You Don't Say," the dangers of gossip, on television program *Primary Focus* the week of August 12. Other subjects covered this fall include eating disorders, psychics, witchcraft and the persecuted church. View a complete list of stations airing *Primary Focus* at the Back to God Hour web site, www.btgh.org or www.primary-focus.org.



Story Hour Little Lambs

CHILDREN'S MINISTRY MAGAZINE

Children's Ministry Magazine continues to be an excellent resource for churches desiring to reach children for Christ. You'll find practical tips and advice for working with children of all ages. Available from Group Publishing, Inc., 1515 Cascade Ave., Loveland, CO, 80538-8681. Web site: www.childrensministry.com.

ON THE WEB

Web site www.makingfriends.com is loaded with craft ideas. Although this site also sells products, it contains many patterns and ideas you can use free of charge.

SING-ALONG PRAISE SONGBOOK

Motions and music for the 16 songs on the *Sing-Along Praise* CD and tapes from Story Hour Year 2 have been conveniently compiled into this helpful resource. Also included are tips for singing with preschoolers from Jacquelyn Negus.

Songbook

#001668CT \$9.95^{US}/14.45^{CDN}

Cassette

#001666CT \$8.95^{US}/13.00^{CDN}

CD

#001667CT \$13.95^{US}/20.25^{CDN}

To order, call 1-800-333-8300 or visit www.FaithAliveResources.org.

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SMALL TALK

FOR SMALL GROUPS

FALL 2001

HI, MY NAME IS CURT, AND I'M A...

Part of the young seminary student's assignment for the course on Small Group Ministries was to visit a local meeting of Alcoholics Anonymous. He phoned ahead, explained his purpose and got directions, but when he arrived there was no contact person he could identify. So he stumbled into a

closed session and joined a group already in process—a group that knew he didn't belong there, but somehow permitted him to stay. What seminarian

Curt Kuiper was about to experience was authentic community and would leave him thirsting for more of the same.

One of the men began to speak. The others listened—really listened. "Intently," says Curt. "No person was ever interrupted." In fact, the person

speaking would announce when he was finished and only then would the next one begin.

This new "insider" saw men trusting each other and accepting each other. He felt their vulnerability. He marveled at the level of recognition they had of their own needs as well as their need for a higher power. "They realize how much they need each person in order to have the strength to face each day," Curt noticed. "Overcoming, or at least beginning to control the disease, happens in community."

This certainly flies in the face of a culture that prizes individualism, a culture that tells them to handle things "like a man," to be that rock, that island. Curt reflected on Simon and Garfunkle for a moment and then asked me, the interviewer, this question: "But what are the **last lines** of that song?"

It was my turn to think. I hummed the phrases, "I am a rock. I am an island," and answered: "And a rock feels no pain. And an island never cries."

"First of all, God created us.
Second of all, he created us for community."

Curtis J. Kuiper

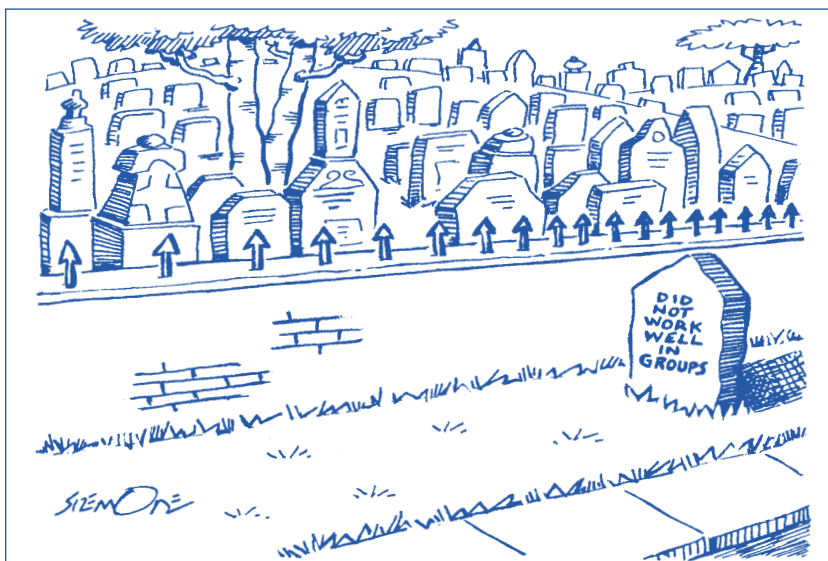
Then Curt continued, "That's getting rid of your humanity. That means you're sacrificing being human, because humans do cry and do feel pain! And you're only hurting yourself more by not reaching out-side yourself, 'cause if there are people out there to help you carry that burden, it's a much easier road than carrying it yourself."

Curt began learning this lesson in college when six guys met weekly for what they called "Prayer and Share." He admits that allowing himself to be vulnerable was not very comfortable, but it was a place of great affirmation, healing, joy and unity. "For me, that was the closest thing to authentic community I have experienced."

This memory was reinforced in the AA meeting. Afterwards one gentleman invited Curt for coffee and spent close to an hour addressing his questions. In fifteen years, there was only one other person permitted to sit in with this group. "It was a really powerful experience," Curt reflected. "I didn't realize the gift they had given me until after the experience. They allowed me to come in and taste what they were tasting."

And it was very good.

Marjo Jordan, Co-Editor



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Small Groups

SMALL GROUPS

WELL-TRAINED LEADERS

Don't overlook one of your most valuable resources—leadership training. Locate the workshop nearest you on the enclosed schedule. Find your small group ministry representative on the reverse side. Then, make that call.

LEADERSHIP TEAMS

George Barna identifies four leadership aptitudes that are necessary for a balanced leadership team:

- 1. Directing leaders**
 - Strengths – big picture people, high profile, passionate, motivate people for the visions of small groups
 - Weakness – don't do details, impatient
- 2. Strategic leaders**
 - Strengths – work well with information, detail-oriented, low-profile
 - Weakness – perfectionistic
- 3. Team-building leaders**
 - Strengths – likes people, gets to know them easily, builds cohesion
 - Weakness – too trusting, don't do details, get burned
- 4. Operational leader**
 - Strength – systems thinker, good with budgets, details
 - Weakness – lose sight of big picture, hate conflict, compromise too easily

Evaluate your leadership team in light of these leadership qualities. A balance of these four aptitudes will build a strong leadership team for your small group ministry.

Barna Research Group. Ltd. www.BARNA.org

HOW DOES IT ALL FIT?

You likely have made the discovery that small groups are wonderful! Even more, they are one of the best ways to do meaningful ministry in our busy world.

Some of you meet with your small group independent of any organization. You may be a Bible study or prayer group that meets in your neighborhood. Your group has an important and vital role in building God's kingdom.

However, many of you are connected to a church or other organization. Your small group is part of a bigger picture. Often we find that there is confusion when it comes to that big picture. Small groups have "happened" because of needs or good leaders, but there seems to be something missing. Have you ever wondered where your group fits in the overall ministry of your church? Do you feel connected and supported as a leader?

Home Missions Small Group representatives are trained to help churches understand how their mission and vision can be fulfilled through small group ministry. Based on the same principle-based small groups that is used for leader training, churches are encouraged to set up a Management Team, or Support Team. This team focuses on setting vision for the small groups, recruiting and training leaders, supporting and encouraging those leaders, and communicating to the congregation and the church leaders. It's a very important piece of the puzzle that many are missing. If you'd like more information, contact your Regional Small Group Representative and ask about the Management Training.

Diane Dykgraaf, Small Group Ministry Representative, Michigan, Ohio, Kentucky, Tennessee

Have you ever wondered where your group fits in the overall ministry of your church?

RESOURCES

NEW SMALL GROUP CATALOG COMING SOON!

If you do not receive your 2001/02 small group catalog from Faith Alive Christian Resources, please call 1-800-333-8300 or shop online at www.FaithAliveResources.org.

SO YOU'VE BEEN ASKED TO SHARE YOUR FAITH

Diane and Brent Averill

This practical, inspiring pamphlet will help you gain the confidence and skill to share your faith with another person. Single copies \$1.25^{US}/1.80^{CDN}; 10 or more \$0.95^{US}/1.40^{CDN} each (#410119CT).

DISCOVER YOUR BIBLE SERIES UPDATE

Discover *Joshua: Settling the Land* (Part 2 of 2) is now available.

7 sessions. Study guide \$2.95^{US}/4.30^{CDN} (#152600CT); Leader's Guide \$4.10^{US}/5.95^{CDN} (#152515CT).

"This past semester we did Joshua. It was great! We all loved it. I personally rediscovered the Old Testament. I love the history and how it speaks to us even today."

Candi VanderWal, Caledonia, MI

WELCOME

THE NEXT GENERATION

Korean small group rep, Myung Lee, first met Grace and Kyu Paek at a Coffee Break workshop they attended in Albuquerque, New Mexico. Later Myung shared with me her impressions of them. "Someday they will be the next Korean small group rep," she told me.

Those were prophetic words. Beginning July 1, 2001, Myung passed the baton to Grace and Kyu who together will job-share the position as Korean Small Group Representative.

They are not strangers to small groups. They have already been supporting Korean small group ministry by leading workshops for English-speaking 1.5 generation (those who came to the U.S. and Canada after age 15) and second generation Koreans (those born in North America or who immigrated with their parents at an early age). Both Grace and Kyu understand inductive small-group Bible study, and are committed to equipping leaders for this ministry. Both have a passion for reaching youth and developing leadership in them. They are comfortable leading workshops in either Korean or English.

They make a wonderful leadership team, dividing the leadership responsibilities and each working in the area of their giftedness. As a husband-wife duo they impact both men and women in the Korean community. I love their heart and know they will build on the strong foundation Myung Lee built, taking Coffee Break and small groups to the next generation.

Myung Lee will continue to assist them by leading workshops for first generation Koreans. To reach the Paeks, call 714-995-4461 or e-mail at kspaek@juno.com. Please pray for God's guidance as they respond to his call.

Betty Veldman, Director of Small Group Ministries



Small Groups

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