

CONNECTIONS

SPRING 2001

RETURN TO YOUR FIRST LOVE

I did you make any ministry New Year's resolutions for 2001? If so, I hope they included being faithful to your "first love" in Coffee Break, making it a ministry that truly reaches lost people. A new millennium and a new year are good times to start fresh. In the Coffee Break Core Values booklet, *Linking to the Lost*, Donna Vander Griend writes an open letter to Coffee Break leaders encouraging them to "stay the course" and remain unwavering in pursuing the foundational purpose of Coffee Break—"to draw women into a personal, growing, vital relationship with Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord." Read her letter and re-evaluate your program's purpose and your personal responsibility in pursuing those goals. Then pray for God to show his leading as you make the adjustments needed to be all God intends your ministry to be.

Betty Veldman, Director of Small Groups Ministry

DEFINING EVANGELISM ONE MORE TIME

How am I doing? Am I evangelistic? A better question might be, "Am I doing all that is humanly and supernaturally possible to bring my lost friend to Jesus Christ?"

Does that question cause you to stumble through your guilt, seeking a definition of "evangelistic" that lets you off the hook?

Remember that God uses us in mysterious ways. We will never be able to clearly see or neatly measure what he is doing through us in the lives of others.

Look at Scripture and discover again the character traits God wants to develop in you. An evangelistic person who effectively links to the lost is

FOUND AND SAVED

"That if you confess with your mouth, 'Jesus is Lord,' and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved" (Romans 10:9).

OUT AND AMONG

"For we are to God the aroma of Christ among those who are being saved and those who are perishing. To the one we are the smell of death; to the other, the fragrance of life. And who is equal to such a task?" (2 Corinthians 2:15-16).

BURDENED

The apostle Paul expressed "great sorrow and unceasing anguish of heart" over the lost (Romans 9:1-3).

DEPENDENT ON GOD

"...he [the Holy Spirit] will convict the world of guilt...he will guide you into all truth" (John 16:8,13).

"...do not worry...for the Holy Spirit will teach you in that time what you should say" (Luke 12:11-12).

continued



A LETTER TO COFFEE BREAK LEADERS

To Coffee Break leaders in churches across North America:

- Have you forgotten the passion you had for beginning your evangelistic ministry?
- Have you gone from an impassioned calling about reaching out to an "if-time-allows" apathy?
- Are you becoming lukewarm?
- Are you holding fast to your evangelistic goal of linking to the lost?

The words of the apostle John from Revelation echo down to you through the ages:

"I know your deeds, your love and faith, your service and perseverance,

and that you are now doing more than you did at first" (Rev. 2:19).

"I know your deeds. See, I have placed before you an open door that no one can shut;...you have kept my word and have not denied my name" (Rev. 3:8).

"Those whom I love I rebuke and discipline. So be earnest, and repent. Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him, and he with me" (Rev. 3:19-20).

May this booklet be the kind of spiritual feeding Jesus would serve you for your encouragement and patient endurance. It works at the gut level, asks for personal change, and tries to bring you back to your first love: Jesus Christ and his gospel.

As you sit in your leaders' meetings feasting in Christ's presence, taking in all that he has for you, absorbing the contents of this booklet, may you be filled with the wonder that you belong to him!

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Coffee Break



Small Groups



Story Hour Little Lambs

PRONE TO ACTION

"...let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven" (Matthew 5:16).

ENCOURAGING

"Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful. And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds" (Hebrews 10:23-24).

VERBAL

"Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have" (1 Peter 3:15).

PRAYERFUL

"Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us..." (Ephesians 3:20).

BOLD

"Pray also for me, that whenever I open my mouth, words may be given me so that I will fearlessly make known the mystery of the gospel" (Ephesians 6:19).

LOVING

"For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life" (John 3:16).

PERSONAL CHALLENGE

Star the top three characteristics of an evangelistic person that you need to work on. Write down ways that you can make them more a part of your everyday life. Pray that God would build these characteristics into your life.

GROUP CHALLENGE

Pray together one verse from this chapter at every leader's meeting and agree to put the challenge of God's Word into practice throughout the week. Report successes and discouragements and hold each other up in prayer.

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Editor's Note: *Linking to the Lost* is a must-read for anyone who wants to share Christ with others. Available from CRC Publications, 1-800-333-8300. #152054CT \$2.95^{US}/4.30^{CDN}



SMALL GROUP EVANGELISM CONFERENCE FOR WOMEN

We're making some changes in the Coffee Break/Story Hour Convention. Have you noticed? Starting in 2002, the event will be called the Small Group Evangelism Conference for Women. It will be hosted by Coffee Break/Story Hour/Little Lambs Ministries.

Why the changes? Because we believe that God is stretching us and asking us to share his blessings with others—sort of like the "empty chair" idea that Coffee Break has always encouraged. We're calling the event a conference because that more accurately describes what it is. And we're opening the "conference" to women involved in all kinds of outreach small groups because we want to encourage what God is blessing and help to equip and inspire them too. We're intentionally including "evangelism" in the title because that is an integral part of Coffee Break and makes very clear what our

focus is. Plus, for the first time ever, we're holding the conference on a weekend, hoping to ease the burden of employed leaders who have had to take precious vacation time meant for their families in order to attend past conventions. This doesn't mean all future conferences will be held on weekends, but we do want to try this format once. We'll be intentionally spending a lot of time in worship and praise and prayer.

Not everything will change, of course. We'll continue to provide Coffee Break/Story Hour/Little Lambs-focused leadership training and opportunities for personal and spiritual growth. After all, they're the ministries that are hosting the event. But because many breakouts apply to other kinds of groups, we hope to encourage other women in ministry as well.

Change does not come without pain and sometimes a sense of loss. It means moving beyond what was safe and comfortable and being willing to give up the familiar and risk the unknown. But we're excited about what God has in store and are following his leading in faith and obedience. We trust him to bless our desire to share what he has entrusted to us. Anticipate the joy of a new chapter of growth in God's kingdom through the Small Group Evangelism Conference for Women. Plan now to join us.

Betty Veldman, Director of Small Group Ministries

LOBSTER SHELLS AND A BIBLE

When God called Bev Snelgrove home last September, her pastor asked for her personal Bible so he could learn a little more about her as he prepared her funeral service. Bev had been an active member of Alymer, Ontario's Coffee Break for 25 years, and her Bible testified to her love for Coffee Break. It was fully highlighted and marked with personal notes and discoveries.

Stuffed between her Bible's well-worn pages was also a copy of her personal testimony. In it, she mentioned running across a modern parable about a lobster that was upset with his Creator. You see, the Creator designed a shell that was to be replaced by another shell as the lobster grew. Well, the lobster told the Creator

this design was a big mistake and quite inconvenient. The lobster liked himself just the way he was. So, the Creator agreed to allow him to stay in his current shell.

Bev writes, "Of course, as we all know, everything changes continuously, and no one remains the same. That's the way the Creator designed things. I realized I had been like that lobster for a lot of years...; I still tend to drag my feet in resisting change. If we limit ourselves while we wait for perfection, a great many gifts will be wasted and our growth will come to a standstill."

Bev, a self-described "ex-lobster," came out of her shell and allowed God to change her. Her Bible testified to those changes. What would your Bible say about you?

Marjo Jordan, Co-Editor



SPRING CLEANING

Are you one of those people who charges into spring with the urge to clean? Not me! It's not that it's not needed; I have a very busy family and we do our fair share of making a mess. It's just that I don't like to clean. My secret wish was always for a "self-cleaning" house, so that I could spend more time doing the *important* things—like writing this article.

Well, last summer I got my wish. We had a fire in the house (while we were gone), and were forced to move out while contractors came in and totally cleaned and remodeled. Every closet, every cupboard, every corner was made new. This was not a fun experience, but there were some very important lessons we learned.

1. In order to be made clean, you have to get rid of what's dirty and old. The huge dumpster in our driveway was a painful reminder that many of our possessions were now trash. This was also a spiritual wake-up call for me. I asked myself, "What do I have hanging around in my life that needs to be thrown out?" Sometimes we keep cramming good things in without making room for them. It may be time to evaluate your children's program and ask the same question. Is it time for a change? Often we become attached to something that worked well ten or fifteen years ago, and we want to keep making it work no matter what. As you near the end of your Story Hour/Little Lambs season, take time as leaders to think about changes that could be made to more effectively reach children with the good news of Jesus.

2. The process involves surrender. In the case of our fire, we had to get out of the way and let someone else have



total control. The same is true for our spiritual lives. The cleansing and renewing of our souls takes place only when we surrender it to the Holy Spirit. Our ministries also need to be surrendered to God. We

work and serve not to please ourselves, but to bring honor and glory to God. Sometimes we need to get out of the way, get down on our knees and surrender our programs to Him.

3. The process may be painful, but there is a reward at the end. It was a happy day

when we moved back into our home! At the end of a good housecleaning there is a feeling of accomplishment. I've always thought of life as a journey, and often a rough one. But God promises that if we stick with it, the reward far outweighs the struggle. It's this hope that keeps us reaching out to others. God has given us his

passion to see all people come to salvation. Is that the true purpose of your ministry?

Several days after the fire I was reading from the book of Revelation during my devotions, and God came to me with comfort and a smile and said, "Look! I am making everything new!" I know that verse wasn't written about my house but for my heart and for the kingdom He is building. He is using you and your ministry in that kingdom. How is God making it "new"? Read the rest of Revelation 21 for the beautiful picture of the reward at the end of the journey. Ask the tough questions, do the hard work, and hang in there. It will be worth it!

Diane Dykgraaf, Story Hour/Little Lambs Specialist

"When two of you get together on anything at all on earth and make a prayer of it, my Father in heaven goes into action. And when two or three of you are together because of me, you can be sure that I'll be there."

Jesus, Matthew 18:19-2,
The Message

LORD, TEACH US TO PRAY.

Have you prayed for a child lately? No doubt prayer has sustained you through another season of Story Hour ministry with children. But now that spring is arriving and the end of that season is in sight, we tend to let up in our prayer intensity. I'm encouraging you to step up your prayer this year. Pray for understanding and insight for the children as you tell the wonderful stories of Jesus. Ask the Holy Spirit to impress on them the awesome love that led Jesus to the cross and the power and victory of the resurrection. The experiences they have today will shape their minds and hearts for a lifetime.

I continue to learn about prayer from those around me, as well as time spent in quiet and in God's Word. Share ideas with each other. Learn from each other, and be sure to spend part of your time together in prayer.

Prayer has always been the foundation of the Coffee Break/Story Hour/Little Lambs ministry, and is not only for us as leaders, but for the children as well. One of the greatest gifts we can give them is to teach them to pray.

Try some of the ideas in the Idea Share section of this *Connections* to help your children "connect" with the God who made and loves them!

Diane Dykgraaf



Story Hour
Little Lambs

STORY HOUR

idea share



Coffee Break

SUGGESTED READING FOR A NONBELIEVER

At the Calvin College Festival of Faith & Writing Conference 2000 a panel of authors responded to the question, "What books are there for the seeking person?" They agreed to point a nonbeliever to any of the Christian classics including books by

C.S. Lewis, J.R.R.

Tolkein and John Bunyan.

Flannery O'Connor was mentioned, along with this list:

Kathleen Norris - *Dakota,*

Amazing Grace: A Vocabulary of Faith; The Cloister Walk

Anne Lamott - *Traveling*

Mercies: Some Thoughts on Faith; Crooked Little Heart

Dan Wakefield - *Returning; How Do We Know When It's God?*

Diane M. Komp, M.D. - *Images*

of Grace; A Pediatrician's Trilogy of Faith, Hope, and Love

Walker Percy - *The Thanatos*

Syndrome; The Moviegoer; The Second Coming

Timothy K. Jones - *Awake My*

Soul: Practical Spirituality for Busy People

Lee Strobel - *The Case for Christ: A*

Journalist's Personal Investigation of the Evidence for Jesus (Available

from CRC Publications, #230030LL \$12.99^{US}/18.85^{CDN}); *The Case for Faith: A Journalist Investigates the Toughest Objections to Christianity* (#230032CT \$12.99^{US}/18.85^{CDN})

Robert Coles - *The Secular Mind; Harvard Diary: Reflections of the Sacred and the Secular; The Moral Life of Children; The Spiritual Life of Children; The Call of Stories; Teaching and the Moral Imagination*

Fred B. Craddock - *Overhearing the Gospel* (out of print)

NEWS THROUGH A CHRISTIAN EYE

Check out the television program *Primary Focus* on PAX-TV and the Odyssey network the week of February 18. "Who Is My Neighbor?" looks at how people in one mid-western city responded when a Muslim group wanted to buy a church and build a mosque. *Primary Focus* looks at what loving your neighbor can mean when that neighbor may not look or act the same as you. For a complete list of stations go to the Back

to God Hour web site www.btgh.org or www.primary-focus.org.

EASTER ENCOURAGERS

"Easter Encouragers make husbands look bad," said one guy in Pella, Iowa. Why? Because similar to Secret Pals, Easter Encouragers go out of their way to brighten the lives of a special "secret" someone in ways even doting husbands miss. These Coffee Break ladies in disguise from Calvary Church drew names seven weeks before Easter and "encouraged" another person until their Easter brunch, when they revealed themselves to each other.

TOOLS FOR SHARING CHRIST

Check out the following web sites:

- <http://www.5clicks.com/> - 5 clicks to lead you through developing your own testimony to share with others
- <http://www.powertochange.com/> - an excellent site that leads people to Christ
- <http://www.needhim.org/> - a witnessing journey with several options depending on gender and age
- <http://www.recreationarts.org> - helping churches recreate people through art-based evangelism
- <http://www.gotlife.org/> - an interactive, multimedia site that blends music, spoken word and visuals to present the gospel
- <http://www.gospelcom.net/rbc/10rsn.home/> - 10 reasons to believe in God, the Bible and the Christian faith—more for academic or apologetic settings
- <http://www.gospeloutreach.net/> - questions answered for the intellectual seeker

GLOWING PRAYERS

Using glow-in-the-dark crayons, have the children make a picture of something they want to thank God for. It can be a simple shape or symbol, such as a heart (love), a cross (Jesus), a rainbow (God's promises), etc. Instruct them to hang it on their bedroom wall or bed, so that as they are falling asleep they are reminded to say, "Thank you God for ..."



MORE IDEAS

For more fun and meaningful prayer activities check out your Story Hour Curriculum Revised Edition, Year 1 (page 50), or Year 2 (page 54).



EASTER STUDY

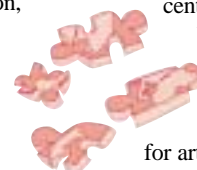
"Thank you for a very usable tool that leads us to truth—at a reasonable price too. I'm eager to use some of the other books in the series," writes Kim Mast from Sunshine Church. *Discover Easter* is available from CRC Publications.

RECOMMENDED READING

The Tale of Three Trees is a traditional folktale retold by Angela Elwell Hunt. As you read this lovely folktale to your Story Hour children, wonder together about God's goodness and love.

READY YOUR ROOM

Early childhood rooms should be furnished for learning through play. Equip centers with building blocks, books and puzzles, displays of God's natural wonders, and home-living toys. Have an easy-to-clean area for art projects.



Age Level Insights, Children's Ministry Magazine, Nov/Dec, 2000.



Story Hour Little Lambs

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SMALL TALK

FOR SMALL GROUPS

SPRING 2001

WOE TO SHEPHERDS WHO ONLY TAKE CARE OF THEMSELVES

I've often heard small group leaders say, "I'm a shepherding leader, not an evangelistic leader." Sometimes an entire group will identify itself this way: "We're a shepherding group, not an evangelistic group."

Is it right to concentrate solely on the needs of your own group without reaching out to the lost?

This is what the Sovereign Lord says:

Woe to the shepherds of Israel who only take care of themselves! Should not shepherds take care of the flock?... You have not strengthened the weak or healed the sick or bound up the injured. You have not brought back the strays or searched for the lost... My sheep wandered over all the mountains and on every high hill. They were scattered over the whole earth, and no one searched or looked for them.

Ezekial 34:2,4,6

This passage confirmed for me that part of the job of a shepherd is taking care of the flock. But another role is seeking the lost. Shepherding and evangelism are not competing or contrasting values. The good shepherd was extremely evangelistic. Seeking the lost is part of shepherding. The small group leader can be an evangelistic shepherd by helping his or her "flock" search for lost sheep.

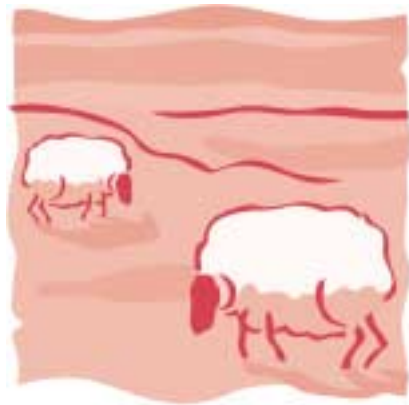
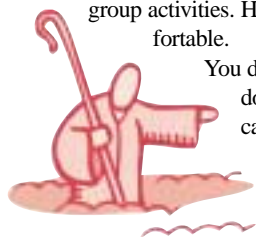
Model concern for the unsaved. Make friendship evangelism a personal priority. Eat lunch with nonbelieving coworkers. Take on a hobby that puts you in contact with non-Christians. Throw a block party for your neighbors. As you develop relationships and start sharing your faith with others, talk about your experiences with your small group.

Pray for the lost. In your small group meetings, make a priority of praying for unsaved friends and neighbors. Ask each person to write the names of unsaved friends on index cards, and pray as a group for those people. Encourage members to take cards home and pray during the week.

Serve together. Express God's love to people in your community by serving them as a group. Steve Sjogren's book, *Conspiracy of Kindness*, as well as his Servant Evangelism's web site (www.kindness.com) have many good ideas.

Welcome others. Look for ways to invite unsaved friends to small group activities. Hold barbecues and other open events where they will feel comfortable.

You don't have to ram the gospel down people's throats, but you don't need to be sheepish about sharing your faith either. Ewe can make a difference!



"Look at it this way. If someone has a hundred sheep and one of them wanders off, doesn't he leave the ninety-nine and go after the one? And if he finds it, doesn't he make far more over it than over the ninety-nine who stay put? Your Father in heaven feels the same way. He doesn't want to lose even one of these simple believers."

Jesus, Matthew 18:12-14, *The Message*

WELCOMING A STRANGER

I just finished reading a delightful story that I received as a Christmas gift. It's called *A Stranger for Christmas* by Carol Lynn Pearson and is set in an assisted living retirement home in California. Two women whose lives have been very different from one another now share a room and are facing Christmas alone. Florence had been a character actress in Hollywood and was a dramatic presence in a rather drab setting. She had never married, had no children.

Myrna, on the other hand, had had a fairy tale life in Idaho with a loving husband and five wonderful children, now grown with families of their own. She was a widow, and the ravages of arthritis had resulted in a move to the warmer climes of California, where she and Florence became roommates. Myrna's increasing immobility meant this was the first Christmas she would not be able to travel to see her family.

continued



Small Groups

SMALL GROUPS



Small Groups

Two days before Christmas Florence begins fantasizing, dreaming of a loving family who would come and want to “borrow a grandma for Christmas,” then scoffs at the very idea that any family would be generous enough to include a total stranger as part of their Christmas celebration. Myrna takes the bait and insists lots of people would do just that. “Who?” demands Florence. Pushed into a corner, Myrna offers her own children as examples. Florence challenges her to prove it. She concocts a story about a “pen pal” in Idaho and eggs Myrna into calling her children and asking them to invite this lonely friend for Christmas. Would they respond? Did the Christian values Myrna tried to instill in her children “take”? Myrna learns as much as Florence does.

The story gave me pause. I regret the times I was too self-absorbed and concerned with my own life to be sensitive to the lonely and hurting, the “strangers” in my life. In my past eight years of singleness, I have become the “stranger” in many ways, and I have been grateful for all those who have included me. I have also been nudged by my own circumstances to include strangers into my life, and find they are not strangers at all, but people whose pain and struggles and needs and longings are much the same as mine. They need more than anything—as I do—to know the richness of God’s grace. I have been privileged to share it with them.

So this year I am rejoicing that God allowed strangers to grace my life. I’m

rejoicing with Tina, who experienced the miracle of God’s saving grace this past year, and who recently became engaged to marry a man who loves God and loves her. I’m celebrating with Ginette and her husband in the birth of beautiful baby boy. Her marriage and her son are God’s gifts of grace. Ginette lived with me briefly when she was pregnant and single at the tender age of 18. Her selfless gift of a daughter she felt unable to care for was God’s grace to a family longing to adopt.

There are “strangers” in all our lives, if we only take the time to see them. Some only brush our lives momentarily; others wrap themselves around our heart and make it their home. But this making-room-for-strangers business needs to be a conscious decision to share God’s grace as others have shared it with us.

It’s a new year. How will you make room for strangers in your life this year? How will you make room in your small groups, in your Coffee Break or Story Hour or Little Lambs? Will you look for them? Will you inconvenience yourself for them? Will you be blessed by their presence?

For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in ... whatever you did for one of the least of these ... you did it for me (Matthew 25:35,40).

Betty Veldman, Director of Small Group Ministries

CROSSING ENEMY LINES

It was a radical idea, but a Wednesday evening Bible study group dared to do it. They decided to take the word “evangelism” seriously and just do it!

They prayed, they studied, they asked questions, and then they did the hard part. They knew that in an evangelistic group, seekers needed to outnumber Christians. So, this group of mature believers who had been together for five years decided to split up. While agreeing to still meet at least once a month for fellowship and prayer, they intentionally divided their group into three evangelistic small groups.

Next they invited friends. Jeffrey Arnold in his book, *Small Group Outreach, Turning Groups Inside Out*, describes the results in chapter 8.

Arnold goes on to describe two ways of invading a country—attack as we did in the Gulf War or infiltrate like F.B.I. agents would do. He admits it’s risky to cross the enemy lines, because Satan does not give up his territory easily:

“Unfortunately, many Christians back away from the challenges of evangelistic small group ministry. ‘Can’t we do something safer?’ they ask. But where would we be if early Christians had similarly backed away? In Acts 4, facing the threat of persecution, the Christians (many of them baby Christians) prayed not for safety but for boldness. Such courage is called for in the post-Christian world in which we live.”

Jeffrey Arnold’s book is available through CRC Publications.

#21674CT \$8.99^{US}/13.05^{CDN}

Marjo Jordan, Co-Editor

MORE THAN SMALL TALK

This *Small Talk* is part of a larger newsletter, *Connections*, that includes pertinent topics for small groups. If you wish to subscribe to the entire publication, let us know at 1-888-644-0814 or jordanm@crcna.org.

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