

CONNECTIONS

WINTER 2001

NOT EVERYTHING CHANGES

I sat next to my mom on the loveseat in the nursing facility she calls home and held her hand. “Mom, do you know who I am?” I asked. She looked at me closely and smiled. “Yes,” she said. Then she looked at my sister, Jan, nodded my way, and asked her, “Do you know who she is?”

My sister laughed. “Yes, Mom, I know who she is.” Jan leaned forward in her chair and looked intently into Mom’s eyes. “Who is she?” she asked, as aware as I was that Mom had not said my name. Again my mother turned to me and her eyes locked with mine. I held my breath and squeezed her hand. Then she said, “She’s Betty Veldman.” I breathed a sigh of relief. Such a simple thing for my mother to know my name, but as the cruelty of Alzheimer’s has invaded her mind, such a triumph.

What a change. This was the competent, compassionate woman who had modeled a servant’s heart in my life. She had capably directed Coffee Break in her church. Her insights into Scripture had come from intimate familiarity with God’s Word. Her discipline of daily prayer had challenged me. One of my strongest childhood memories is seeing her kneel by her bed in prayer. Knowing she prayed for me daily had comforted and encouraged me. I had learned much about unconditional love from what she modeled for me. The mother I had grown up with and known as an adult daughter was not the woman I sat next to. This woman I feared would not know my name was a stranger in my mother’s body.

Change in my mother has led to other changes. Together my sister and I have grasped for new ways to communicate

with the mother we love who is imprisoned by the indignity of this disease. We have found it in familiar hymns and Bible passages. God’s Word endures beyond the ravages of disease. Though we don’t converse, we sing and share Scripture together. My mother struggles to remember my name, but confidently sings, “And he walks with me and he talks with me and he tells me I am his own. And the joy we share as we tarry there, none other has ever known.”

Change is not easy and often it is painful. Even the best changes in our lives entail letting go of what once was. I am grateful for what does not change—God and his Word. Mal 3:6 (NIV) says, “I the LORD do not change. So you, O descendants of Jacob, are not destroyed.” Disease may destroy my mother’s body and her mind, but her changeless Savior holds her fast in his care.

The terrorist attacks on New York City and Washington D.C. September 11 forever changed our perception of a hijacking. It changed people’s priorities, and it changed our realities. It also sent people searching for what was changeless. Many who had never thought about God before entered churches and prayed.

Remember that in all of the changes in life, you invest in what does not change when you lead Coffee Break and Story Hour/Little Lambs. Though we may change formats, times we meet, and ways we reach out to people, our message does not change. Sinners in a broken world need a loving Savior. God’s Word endures forever.

Betty Veldman, Director of Small Group Ministries

WHAT SONG WILL WE SING AT THE END OF OUR LIVES?

Communicating through song is the last function of the brain affected by Alzheimer’s. Last spring my pastor challenged our congregation with these words, “What song will you sing at the end of your life?”

Good question. What songs have you hidden in your heart? What songs are you teaching in Coffee Break and Story Hour or Little Lambs?

What song will you be singing?

Marjo Jordan, Co-Editor



THE LESSON OF THE COFFEE BEAN

A daughter complained to her father about how hard things were for her. “As soon as I solve one problem,” he said, “another one comes up. I am tired of struggling.” Her father, a chef, took her to the kitchen where he filled three pots with water and placed each on a high fire. Soon the pots came to a boil. In one

continued



Coffee Break



Small Groups



Story Hour
Little Lambs

he placed carrots, in the second, eggs, and in the last, ground coffee beans. He let them sit and boil, without saying a word.

The daughter impatiently waited, wondering what he was doing. After a while, he went over and turned off the burners. He fished out the carrots and placed them in a bowl. He pulled the eggs out and placed them in a bowl. He poured the coffee into a bowl. Turning to her he asked, "Darling, what do you see?"

"Carrots, eggs, and coffee," she replied. He brought her closer and asked her to feel the carrots. She did and noted that they were soft. He then asked her to take an egg and break it. After pulling off the shell, she observed the hard-boiled egg. Finally, he asked her to sip the coffee. She smiled, as she tasted its rich flavor.

She asked, "What does it mean, Father?" He explained that each of them had faced the same adversity—boiling water—but each reacted differently.

The carrot went in strong, hard, and unrelenting, but after being subjected to the boiling water, it softened and became weak. The egg was fragile. Its thin outer shell had protected its liquid interior, but after sitting through the boiling water, its inside hardened.

The ground coffee beans were unique, however. By being in the boiling water, they changed the water.

He asked his daughter, "When adversity knocks on your door, which are you?"

Used by permission of PreachingToday.com

He explained that the carrot, the egg and the coffee bean had faced the same adversity—boiling water—but each reacted differently.

CONFERENCE NEXT SUMMER

Plan to attend the Small Group Evangelism Conference for Women the weekend of July 12-14, 2002. You won't want to miss the opportunity to sit at the feet of rabbi, Ray Vander Laan, or hear from David Stark, author of the small group training materials many of you are familiar with. Listen to Nancy Leigh De Moss and Stephanie Fast and worship God with Colleen and Grace.

Notice the enclosed reminder card in this issue. In the next *Connections* that arrives in early January, you'll receive a registration brochure and hotel information. At the same time, the registration form will also be available for printing off the web, www.coffeebreakministries.org. If you register before March 30, 2002, you'll be able to take advantage of the early bird special price of \$199.00 US.

The conference is open to all women who lead or are interested in leading evangelistic small groups. The conference teams are planning a wonderful time for you! So, join us on the banks of the Mississippi River in St. Paul, Minnesota next July. "The river of God is teeming with life, and all who touch it will be revived."



"A long term leader told me after the Coffee Break workshop that one thing she loves about Coffee Break is how we are always changing and moving ahead to keep up with the changing times."

Hilda Vander Klippe, Small Group Ministry Representative, Central & Eastern Canada

ENCOURAGING WORDS FOR COFFEE BREAK LEADERS

"It is the first Bible study I have ever participated in. It has awakened in me a thirst for the Bible and its teachings. Also it has inspired me tremendously in my prayer life. By the testimonies of others in the groups, I see how God is at work in all of our lives."

"I am a total novice when it comes to the Bible, so I might seem quiet at times, but I am gaining insight and opening up to being closer to God."

"I have learned more about God through the Bible studies. I wouldn't have been able to understand it without Coffee Break."

"Bible study gives me focus. When life is hectic with schedules, kids and family, Coffee Break is a place to take a BREAK, literally."

Women from Shawnee Park Church, Grand Rapids, MI

DIRECTORS' REMINDER



If you haven't done so already, 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, ordanm@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. And thank you, all of you, who have communicated with us this quarter.

YOUR TOUCH

*“Lord, you have touched me and I have grown.
May my touch help others grow.”*

This beautiful prayer was the class motto for the 1971 graduating class of Pine Rest School of Nursing. Story Hour Director, Ruth Lytle, used these words to inspire us as we began a new season of working with children. *“This is what we’re about. This is what we do in Story Hour, Little Lambs, and nursery,”* she said.

So simple, yet so profound. I’m amazed that young nursing students would choose such a beautiful and timeless prayer for their motto. Undoubtedly the thirty years since graduation have brought many significant changes into their lives. But the truth of God’s love and his touch remain the same.

The world our children live in is changing at a faster rate than ever before. We should ask ourselves, how we can touch the lives of these little ones in ways

that will help them face the world with confidence. What will guide them through the inevitable storms of life?

We are so fortunate to have wonderful curriculums and music to communicate the truths of God’s word and his love. We are also privileged to spend time with and build relationships with these little ones. But we cannot always be with them. Only God can. If we can teach the children to pray, we offer them a gift that will give them strength in any crisis and last for an eternity. Be encouraged as you read Cameron’s story on this page.

God must love to hear the prayers of these little ones, for their young minds are not as “earth-bound” as ours are. Calls for

help in the middle of the night, or when parents are fighting in the next room will certainly be honored by the Source of all comfort and hope. Prayers for healing and prayers of thanks rising from a simple child-like trust in the all-powerful God of the universe must bring delight to the One who is in control of all things.

Let’s begin as the nursing students did, remembering God’s touch in our life. Then commit to touching young lives for God. Pray for them, pray with them, and teach them to pray.

Diane Dygkraaf, Story Hour, Little Lambs Specialist

*Pray for them, pray
with them, and teach
them to pray.*

Cameron’s Prayer

Doleful brown eyes locked with mine. Tears welled up and spilled down flushed cheeks. I pulled Cameron’s quivering little body close to mine and rocked him gently. How I had grown to love this precocious four-year-old!

“It’s scary to go to bed without your mom, isn’t it, Cameron?” I asked softly. He nodded, sad eyes pleading with me for help. I hugged him a little tighter.

Cameron and his single-parent mom had been guests in my home for five months of his mother’s crisis pregnancy. I was her shepherding mom, and Cameron was the delightful bonus that came with her. Having just given birth, Cameron’s mother was in the hospital overnight.

Never before had she left Cameron. They slept in the same bed, and often Cameron wouldn’t let her out of his sight, trailing her from room to room in the house. The two had developed a dependency on one another born of a life of pain. Now he was struggling to cope for one night without her.

It was January, and I had recently experienced the joy of introducing Cameron and his mom to the baby Jesus of Christmas for the first time in their lives. On this night, Cameron and I had just read the Christmas story again.

“You know, Cameron,” I said, “even if your mom can’t be here to take care of you, you’re not alone. Jesus is here with you, and he will always take care of you.”



Cameron tilted his head back and looked at me skeptically as he struggled to make sense of what I had said. I had pledged never to lie to this precious child whose life was marred by mistrust and violence. He knew that and he trusted me. But what I had just told him didn’t add up.

“How can a baby take care of me?” he demanded.

I laughed. “Oh, Cameron,” I said, “Jesus didn’t stay a baby. He grew up to be a man. He is God’s Son, and because he loves you so very much, he even died on a cross to save you. Now he’s in heaven, and he will never leave you alone.

He will stay with you in your bed all night long. You don’t have to be afraid when Jesus is with you.”

I felt Cameron’s tense little body relax as he tested the truth of what I had said. I was awed at the simple faith with which he accepted my words.

Later in the year, after watching the Easter story on TV, Cameron was transfixed. He turned to me and with wonder said, “Betty, I love Jesus. When

I’m afraid in the dark, I just pray, ‘Dear Jesus, please be with me,’ and then I’m not afraid anymore.” He clasped his hands tightly together and squeezed his eyes shut as he prayed.

As you teach Story Hour or Little Lambs, never doubt the importance of sharing Jesus’ love with little children. Many of them live shattered lives beyond our imagining. Planting the seeds of faith by teaching them about Jesus while they are still young may provide fruit beyond your wildest imagining! Anticipate a blessing as you learn the joy of what it means that “a little child shall lead them.”

Betty Veldman, Director of Small Group Ministries, adapted from *Little Ones Need Jesus, Core Values Series*, available from www.FaithAliveResources.org, 1-800-333-8300.



Story Hour
Little Lambs

STORY HOUR

idea share



Coffee Break

NEW WORKSHOP

Have your heard about the new Coffee Break workshop? At your request it's packed with more information and great ideas, yet formatted in three sections to offer you and your leaders scheduling flexibility. The workshop covers leading an inductive Bible study, small group principles to help you understand more about what's going on in the group, and how to keep the evangelistic focus of Coffee Break. The reviews of this new workshop have been great. Check the training schedule on the web, www.coffeebreakministries.org to see if there is a workshop coming to your area, or call your Small Group Ministry Rep. If you're not sure who that is, ask Heidi Moreno at the main office, 1-800-266-2175, ext. 771.

Sam Huizenga, Small Group Ministry Representative, Michigan, Ohio, Kentucky, Tennessee



NEW VIDEO

In less than nine minutes this Coffee Break introductory video, *Jesus, Lifted High*, will whet someone's appetite for more. Use this video to encourage your leaders or even recruit more leaders. See if your church's worship committee would be willing to show this video during a Sunday offering or when you update the congregation on small group ministries in your church. It's well done, it's short, and it's available at no cost through Faith Alive Resources, 1-800-333-8300, www.FaithAliveResources.org (#152016CT).

NEW BULLETIN COVERS

Home Missions provides Coffee Break bulletin covers and Coffee Break bulletin inserts at no charge. Call the Coffee Break office at 1-888-644-0814. Heidi Moreno or Marjo Jordan will arrange to have the inserts or

bulletin covers sent to your church.

There is also a reproducible bulletin cover featuring the Coffee Break logo and the theme "Touching Lives with Love." That one you can run off yourself, is also no charge and available through Faith Alive Resources, 1-800-333-8300, www.FaithAliveResources.org (#152025CT).



CHRISTMAS GIFT IDEAS

UNASHAMED

Francine Rivers

From *The Lineage of Grace* series by best-selling author Francine Rivers. In her trademark style, Francine tells the compelling story of Rahab from the book of Joshua. Readers will gain a fresh understanding of God's work through the life of this unlikely woman in the lineage of Christ. An inductive Bible study is included at the end of the book. (Tyndale)

#152080CT \$12.99^{US}/18.85^{CDN}
ISBN 0-8423-3596-X



UNAFRAID

Francine Rivers

Mary is one of the most revered women in history, but she was an ordinary woman striving to please God in the same way women do today. Readers are sure to gain a new appreciation of the familiar story

through Rivers's signature style. A study on the biblical text is included for personal or group study. An inductive Bible study is included at the end of the book. (Tyndale) #152081CT \$12.99^{US}/18.85^{CDN}
ISBN 0-8423-3599-4

COFFEE BREAK: TOUCHING LIVES WITH LOVE

Marie Van Antwerpen

Read the stories of changed lives through the Coffee Break/Story Hour ministry. This devotional format of 21 stories features women and children whose lives were dramatically changed through the power of God's love. #152063CT \$9.95^{US}/14.30^{CDN}

WHY CHRISTMAS?

Nicky Gumbel

Give your Coffee Break members the Alpha booklet *Why Christmas?* for their personal use or to share with someone in their family or community. Using great cartoons, this evangelistic booklet asks questions about the significance of Christmas. #230020CT \$1.29^{US}/1.90^{CDN}



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



Story Hour Little Lambs

PRAYER IDEAS

1. Write the names of each child in your class on a bookmark to keep in your Bible. Pray for each child by name.
2. Pray together as a teaching team for the children.
3. When praying with children, use words they can understand.
4. Try a "popcorn" prayer with the children. Lead by saying, "Thank you, God, for ... Allow the children to "pop" in with one-word responses.

KUDOS!

"I so appreciate the nursery because without it I would not have this opportunity to learn and grow. Also, my daughter loves it!"

"Story Hour has been a blessing for my child. He has grown so much in his knowledge of Bible stories and his understanding has come out at home."

"The workers in both Story Hour and nursery always made my children feel welcome. I always felt comfortable leaving them there."

"My son really enjoyed Story Hour. I know this because he talks about his projects, the stories, and the leaders. He has saved most, if not all, of the story cards and we read them over."

Thanks to Shawnee Park Church in Grand Rapids, MI, for sharing these responses to an evaluation in the spring of 2001.

ANGEL PRINTS

Cut thin sponges into angel shapes with a scissors. Insert a large safety pin. Clip a clip-style clothespin to the safety pin. Holding the clothespin, stamp the sponge into liquid paint and stamp onto a large dark blue or black piece of construction paper. Younger children can wipe the damp angel sponges across Crayola watercolor paints and stamp onto the paper.

The finished product is a sky full of angels, reminding us of the angelic chorus the shepherds witnessed after Jesus' birth.

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SMALL TALK

FOR SMALL GROUPS

WINTER 2001

WHAT KIND OF SMALL GROUP WOULD YOU CHANGE YOUR SCHEDULE FOR?

Model-based vs. Principle-based

Many churches are making the change from model-driven small groups to principle-based small groups. One small group coordinator said that the decision to change was simply a logical conclusion based on experience. As she put it, "The small groups that are thriving in our church are those whose leaders designed their small groups. Those that are floundering had a model imposed on them."

One of the guiding questions for developing principle-based small groups is, "What kind of small group would you change your schedule to be a part of?" It's by getting in touch with the hearts of small group leaders that creativity is born. But discovering the kind of small group that a leader is "wired" for does not happen in a vacuum. There are three primary factors that influence the design of small groups that people would rearrange their schedules for: 1) passion, 2) gifts, and 3) life experiences.

Take my friend, Chris, for example. She has the gift of encouragement and intercession. She could use those gifts in a variety of small groups. But key in her life is her experience with breast cancer and the changes that experience has made in her life. It would have made sense if she began a support group for breast cancer survivors, but that did not become her passion. Instead, her struggle with depression resulting from her cancer experience gave Chris a passion for encouraging women dealing with depression. So she developed a small group for women struggling with that issue.

What are your gifts? What life experiences have changed you? How have those factors enlightened your passion for connecting with others? What kind of small group might God be calling you to lead as a result? If you are a small group coordinator, how might you share these three factors with others to help them get in touch with God's calling in their lives?

Principle-based small groups make sense. Aligning them with people's gifts, passions, and life experiences make them thrive.

Betty Veldman, Director of Small Group Ministries



EFFECTIVE AFFINITY GROUPS

After months of attending a men's Bible study, my husband still didn't click with the other group members. Eventually he dropped out of the group. Months later he began working with our church's audio-visual team. The group met weekly for planning, troubleshooting, small group Bible study and fellowship. Jeff immediately felt at home and is now a committed and active member.

Jeff was unaware that he had actually joined an affinity group—a group where members share a common interest. Technically his men's group was an affinity group, though its scope was broad. With affinity groups, the more narrow the focus and the more similar the interest, the higher the chance of the group forming a genuine bond.

We discovered the value of affinity groups when we launched a small group of our own. We'd already raised one teen and were in the process of raising two more. Though we were seasoned parents, sometimes the ups and downs of dealing with teenage issues and tantrums seemed nearly insurmountable. Whenever we chatted with other parents of teens, we found them struggling similarly. That's when the light bulb turned on. Why not

continued

SCHEDULE-ALTERING SMALL GROUPS

Hobbies & Sports: Golfing, creative memory books, fishing, music, woodworking, birding, motorcycling, bicycling, hunting, hiking, camping, chess, soccer parents, antiques, horses, quilting, ceramics, painting

Support: Grief, divorce, cancer, depression

Recovery: Codependency, substance abuse, overeating, alcoholism

Parenting: Parents of preschoolers, twins, teens, children with special needs

Singles: Single moms, single dads, retirees, widows, divorce recovery

Education: Teachers, home schoolers, book club, movie reviews

Business & Professional: Medical professionals, writers, home business

Benevolence: Food pantry, soup kitchen, women's shelter



Small Groups

SMALL GROUPS



start an affinity group for parents of teens? So we did.

At our first meeting, we were excited by the immediate bonding between group members. We already had shared interests and issues, so we quickly clicked.

Here are some tips we learned for launching an affinity group.

- 1. Avoid turning the group into just a "club."** Keep a spiritual emphasis. Our group is studying a book on parenting teens, and we alternate weekly between the book contents and studying related Scriptures.
- 2. Allow ample time for sharing** in which members can be honest about their struggles.
- 3. Plan social outings** where group members can simply have fun.
- 4. Plan outreach projects** that reflect shared interests and will stretch group members. This will keep your focus from becoming too inward.
- 5. Be alert to others** whose interests and issues make them a good fit for your group. When you invite new people to join your group, be sure to explain the group's target audience, purpose, and topic of study.

Teena M. Stewart, freelance writer and director of www.ministryinmotion.net seminars and e-zine which train, equip and mobilize people for volunteer ministry. Reprinted with author's permission from "Effective Affinity Groups," *Discipleship Journal*, Issue #125, 2001.

"Much of the essence of true church life is worked out in small groups."

Christian A. Schwarz, *Natural Church Development*

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GO WITH THE FLOW

Dealing With Change

One of the most consistent aspects of life is change. Thus, to grow and develop in this fast-paced society, we must move with it. Here are a few ideas on how we can "go with the flow."

- Realize change is part of God's design. The world has been in motion ever since God created it. God appointed mankind to manage the earthly resources which includes managing change in an appropriate manner, rather than resisting it.
- Learn on the fly, forever. Today, basic education is effective for 10-15 years at most. Continuing education is today's watchword. Learn as you go from every source that you know.
- Rescript challenges. Look for the opportunities in the changes around you, rather than the difficulties.

"Change your life. God's kingdom is here."

Jesus, Matthew 4:17, *The Message*

- Focus on your core. People can live with change all around them if there is a changeless core within them. Spend time developing the spiritual center of your life. Take time each day to read God's Word, meditate and pray. In addition take a few moments to walk or listen to birds, or watch clouds, or listen to your favorite music, or read a book of poetry.
 - Right size your life. Only about 20% of what you do is really necessary. The remaining 80% in your lives is due to your choices. Take time to consider what you can scale back on.
 - Empower those around you. Give those around you more power to make decisions on their own without having to get input from you. Resist the temptation to be an active participant in all meetings and activities.
 - Live by your mission statement. Write a mission statement for your life (25 words or less) and evaluate all that you do against your statement. If an activity does not fit into your statement, consider not being involved.
- To be effective in your life and in the Lord's work requires better management of your time.

Adapted from "The Speed of Change," *The McIntosh Church Growth Network*, Volume 13, Issue 7, by Gary L. McIntosh, www.mcintoshcgn.com

RESOURCES

NEW SMALL GROUP CATALOG

The 2001/02 small group catalog—fifteen pages of resources—is available free of charge from Faith Alive Christian Resources.

DISCOVER PSALMS

Hope When We're Hurting

Carol Veldman Rudie

In light of world events, this is an excellent evangelistic 5-session study for your small group.

Study Guide **#152370CT** \$2.95^{US}/4.30^{CDN}
Leader's Guide **#152375CT** \$4.10^{US}/5.95^{CDN}

FROM THE DARKEST NIGHT

Meditations for Abuse Survivors

Melanie Jansen

If you are leading a support group for abuse survivors, consider this book as a Christmas gift.

#160485CT \$14.95^{US}/21.70^{CDN}

THE PRAYING CHURCH IDEA BOOK

Practical Ways Your Church Can Pray

Douglas A. Kamstra

The power of prayer is vital to every small group. This companion to the

popular *Praying Church Sourcebook* includes prayer strategies that can work in your church, sample worship services, retreat plans, and a comprehensive list of prayer initiatives.

#216851CT \$25.95^{US}/37.65^{CDN}

TRAINING AVAILABLE

Small group representatives are available to schedule and conduct workshops, to provide consulting, to provide counseling on specific concerns, and to answer your small group questions. For more information call 1-800-266-2175.

Call 1-800-333-8300 or shop online at www.FaithAliveResources.org