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Coffee Break Evangelism Manual
with Director's Handbook
Coffee Break
Evangelism Manual
with
Director’s Handbook

Coffee Break
Small Groups
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Coffee Break is a small group inductive Bible study program with the purpose of leading people into a personal relationship with Jesus. The Coffee Break ministry and accompanying Story Hour program began in 1970 on the south side of Chicago as a way to reach women and their children with the gospel of Jesus Christ. The ministry has grown to more than a thousand local programs in Canada and the United States, as well as affiliated groups in six other countries. Several churches now have groups of men and women studying together, as well as groups for men only. Although the Bible study material was designed specifically for Coffee Break, it is also used in other types of small groups, in church school, and in other adult education programs.

There are three guidelines for using the Coffee Break name:

- The program should be small-group based.
- The Bible study should be inductive.
- The purpose should be to reach the lost.

There may be times when your small groups become a bit large, or your leaders choose to do another type of Bible study, or the Lord doesn’t lead any unsaved people into your group, but these should be the exceptions.
rather than the rule. In general, churches that wish to be affiliated with Coffee Break should follow these three guidelines.

Most Coffee Break groups are developed as part of a church’s outreach program, but some are started in homes. The Coffee Break program fits well with the overall outreach strategy of a congregation, whether it is a newly planted church or an established church. Since the focus of Coffee Break is evangelism, the goal is not primarily to recruit new church members but to tell the good news of Jesus Christ. It is a welcome bonus if group members decide to join your church.

More and more churches are recognizing the benefits of developing small groups within the congregation, and the popularity of small groups has risen concurrently with the growth of Coffee Break. The goal of all small groups should be life-change, that is, the transformation of lives because of participation in a small group. The goal of Coffee Break small groups is for members to accept Christ as Savior—the ultimate life-change.

The Coffee Break small group environment provides a warm, relaxed atmosphere that encourages everyone to participate in the Bible study. Trained leaders keep the discussion low-key and nonthreatening, allowing the Holy Spirit to work in the hearts of everyone there. Refreshments add a touch of hospitality and encourage fellowship among group members. These dynamics make Coffee Break a comfortable setting for people to invite friends, family members, and neighbors who are not Christians.

One Coffee Break leader in New York was drawn by the warmth and love of a Coffee Break group almost ten years ago:

“
I came to know the Lord as my personal Savior through Coffee Break Bible study. When I was invited to attend for the first time, I responded with an immediate ‘yes.’ And when I stepped into the basement of Community Christian Reformed Church, I knew there was something very different there that I wanted to be a part of. About fifty women of all ages were studying God’s Word and supporting each other in prayer. There was unity and acceptance that I so desired. No one seemed to care where I came from or how I got there. They were just happy that I was there.”
What Is a Small Group?

A small group is an intentional face-to-face gathering varying in size, regularly meeting together, to accomplish agreed-upon purposes. Members of Coffee Break groups agree to meet weekly in a small group (generally three to twelve people) to study the Bible together. Providing a small group is one way to reach out to people who are looking for a place of belonging or support. A small group setting provides the ideal atmosphere in which to connect disconnected people.

Following Jesus means to “make disciples.” That’s what we do in Coffee Break. Reaching the lost is our primary purpose. Beginning in our individual “Jerusalems” and following wherever God leads us, we invite our neighbors to join us in discovering God through his Word because we are the grateful recipients of God’s grace.

Within that overarching purpose of outreach, Coffee Break groups also include the four primary functions of small groups: being together, caring together, doing together, and learning together. As we build relationships with one another (being together), we discover what the Bible is all about (learning together), model Christ’s love to one another (caring together), and put that love into action (doing together) as needs arise.

As Coffee Break groups grow in these four primary areas, we also see biblical small group principles permeate the entire group. Ask anyone who has been part of a vital Coffee Break group. She’ll tell you she was loved and accepted (the principle of support and belonging), and that she felt the excitement of discovering together things that nobody in her group could discover alone (the principle of synergism). She will also remember what she learned when she shared in the group (principle of learning retention). Over time God’s Word and Spirit transforms people’s lives (the principle of transformation) and they desire to be honest and accountable to one another (the principle of accountability), tackling tough issues in their lives with input from caring group members (the principle of problem solving). Within the safe support of their group they dare to try new things (the principle of risk-taking and experimentation)—all with the encouragement of loving leaders who point the way to God through his Word, extend grace to those they meet, and trust God with the results.
Small Groups Meet People’s Needs

- Many people are genuinely interested in learning more about spiritual things and finding answers to life’s questions in the Bible. Whether those who come to Coffee Break are opening the Bible for the first time, feeling disconnected from God, or cautiously considering God’s claims, they are seeking deeper spiritual meaning in their lives.
- Many people are hungry for the close relationships that can be found in Coffee Break. Their lives may be empty, lonely, and restless. We want everyone who comes to a Coffee Break group to find acceptance and belonging—a safe place to ask questions about life, about relationships, and about God and his Word.
- Many people who would not attend a church worship service will attend a Coffee Break group. Small groups can provide an entry point for people who are wary of the established church. When people develop relationships with others in a small group, they are more open and ready to develop a relationship with God, and they become more willing to attend worship with the people they have learned to love and trust. In Coffee Break people find a place to grow in their faith as they are encouraged and challenged by loving leaders.
The word *inductive* describes a method of studying something. It involves looking at the details and then at the big picture, drawing conclusions based on what has been discovered. The leader in such a group uses questions as the primary method for guiding group members to discover the truths of God’s Word for themselves. Group members work directly with a Bible passage, using questions designed to help them understand the passage. They do not immediately refer to a manual for help in interpreting the passage, or first read a book and then turn to the Bible for information. They do not use the Scripture passage simply as a springboard to launch into their own ideas. Instead, the inductive method requires them to put aside their preconceived notions and to come to the Bible with an open mind to discover what the Scripture says and means. The concept of discovery is so important to Coffee Break that the series of Bible study books designed for Coffee Break is called “Discover Your Bible.” As leaders, we want to help people find out what the Bible has to say.
Why Use the Inductive Method?

- The inductive method honors God’s Word. It recognizes the Bible as the inspired Word of God. It also takes into account the situations and personalities of the human authors God used to give his Word. Inductive study honors the Word by recognizing the significance of every part of a passage.
- The inductive method encourages personal study and insures that the individual’s study will bear even more fruit when joined with the group’s efforts. Using this method guarantees that the group will honestly grapple with the Scripture to discover its important truths.
- Inductive Bible study teaches an important discipline. This kind of Bible study requires time and effort. Learning to ask questions of the text is a discipline that most people will not forget. It will significantly change their understanding of the Bible. Learning this method offers tremendous potential for growth and development for each individual in the group. It is a method that enables group members to feed themselves with God’s Word for a lifetime.
- Inductive Bible study encourages acceptance of the Word. People learn better when they discover a truth than when they are told one. This method invites people to see for themselves, and frequently turns doubters into believers. Being in contact with God’s Word changes lives. Many have come to believe in Jesus as Savior through being part of a Coffee Break group. Many more have seen distinct changes in their lives as a result of studying God’s Word on a regular basis.
- Inductive Bible study is exciting. Digging into God’s Word develops an excitement that keeps Coffee Break members returning week after week, year after year. When people discover that the Bible is interesting and relevant to their needs and problems, they become excited about studying it. God’s Word is powerful in changing lives, even more so when it is studied in a consistent and regular way.

Using Questions to Lead Your Group

In addition to prayer, the most beneficial way a leader can prepare is to plan good questions to ask in the group setting. Your group members will use study guides which present the primary discussion questions. Think of these questions as the skeleton on which the lesson will hang.
The leader’s guide provides supplementary questions for the leader to ask in the group. Not all questions in the leader guide will be used in the group discussion. These supplementary questions are suggestions to the leader, who may or may not choose to use them. In the best of leaders’ meetings the leaders will wrestle with the questions to develop even better ones, ones that reflect the personality of the group and of the leader.

Asking good questions comes naturally to some leaders, but all leaders can develop their skills in this area. The best way is to write down your own questions in response to the passage before you even read the leader’s guide. Once you train yourself to continually ask questions of the text, you will find that question-writing becomes much easier. Writing good questions leads to asking good questions in the group, even when the discussion veers slightly from what was anticipated. If you have worked with the material in developing good questions, you will thoroughly understand the material and you will learn how to keep the discussion flowing through questions.

When writing questions, you can avoid some difficulties by anticipating the answers that group members might give. Determine whether the answer can be found in the text or if it depends on some prior knowledge that is not available to everyone in the group. If you can identify which verse answers your question, you probably have a question that can be answered by anyone in the group.

Ask open-ended questions that cannot be answered by a simple “yes” or “no.” Questions that have several possible answers create a better discussion than do brief answers. Using several different kinds of questions will help to create a more open, sharing atmosphere in your group.

- Use an Opening Share Question as an icebreaker. Some of the leader guides in the Discover Your Bible series provide an Opening Share Question for each lesson. You could also make up your own share question. Make sure that it is a question everyone in the group can answer. This is a way of ensuring that everyone in the group has a chance to talk, which will make them more likely to speak up later during the discussion. These questions need not be related to the lesson, though it is a good challenge to try to make them so. If you were studying the story of Jesus and the Samaritan woman (John 4), for example, you could ask icebreaker questions such as “What’s the
thirstiest you’ve ever been?” or “Did you ever have to ask a stranger for help?”

- Make sure that the group gets the facts straight by using factual observation questions, for example, “Where did this story take place?” or “Where had the disciples gone?”

- Help people see the bigger picture by using interpretation questions. “What do you think the author is really saying?” or “How does Jesus move her from the physical to the spiritual?”

- Low-key application questions should be carefully phrased so that no one feels put on the spot. For example, ask, “How might someone apply this?” or, “What does this say to the twenty-first century?” or, “What does this passage tell us about how we ought to live today?”

Use “we” and “us” rather than “you” to challenge the group without appearing judgmental or putting others on the spot. If you want to use a more pointed application question, consider using a “Traveling Question” designed to provoke some thought on the way home. For example, “How could I work on being more kind this week?”

Other Considerations for Leaders

While using commentaries for interpretation can provide valuable background information for the leader, be cautious in presenting such information to the group. You want to convey to the group that what they need to know is accessible to them in the passage itself. “Study” Bibles function in the same way that commentaries do. Suggest that the group look at the passage first and read the study helps only after the discussion. You may have to remind your group that “the top part is the Bible,” lest they think the real truth can be found in the notes at the bottom of the Bible page.

Occasionally you may refer to another passage to clarify the one under discussion. This is valid, since the Bible is an integrated, unified book in which important biblical truths are repeated in a variety of ways and settings. This also helps the beginning Bible student learn of the Bible’s unity and comprehensiveness. But there are many dangers in using other passages.

- First, doing so tends to set the leader apart as the teacher, making the rest of the group a class. This can dampen the spontaneity of the
discussion. The real teacher is the Bible, and the leader is the person who guides the discussion.

- Second, using other passages may hinder the discovery principle by introducing extra material that the group has not been able to study before the meeting. Group members may be put in the position of becoming observers instead of discoverers by looking at what the leader has already discovered. A good leader will try to find a way to keep the excitement of discovery alive.

- Third, referring to other passages opens the door to misuse of the Scriptures. Texts can be misinterpreted when they are used out of context as isolated statements. We want our group members to learn to use passages correctly and in context. If you use additional passages, make sure that you note the context of the passage and show how it relates to the topic under discussion.