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The Resource Page

... creative and practical ideas

Brought to you this month
by Melissa Hatfield



A book and a cup of joe

I'm writing this article from the comfort of a local coffee shop that has become a haunt of mine. It seemed fitting to come here for inspiration amidst the coffee aroma and quiet elevator music as I gather my thoughts for this article. This local coffee shop has become a church away from the traditional building for one of our Bible study departments as we gather for weekly book studies throughout the year. The department began as a group of young singles and college students and has morphed into a family undefined by life stage or age. Instead, we share an affinity for authentic community, grace-filled fellowship, and relevant faith and life discussions — and a good cup of joe.

It is possible to nurture this desire on Sunday mornings during the regular Sunday school hour; however, there is a completely different atmosphere we crave that is possible on a weeknight off-site in a local coffee shop, eatery or living room. With a cup of joe or hot chocolate in hand, our comfort goes up and our defenses go down. Gathered around the tables that have been pushed together to create an altar of sorts are regular Sunday morning attendees as well as friends who make this gathering their weekly church experience. The weekly book study has become a very effective extension of our Bible study ministry and a wonderful outreach to peers in our community.

Selecting a book is the crucial step in the process. There is no shortage of books available, so select resources of current interest to your group based on a simple poll of the participants. Through talking with peers, scanning websites and blogs, and reading reviews in various publications, you can learn a good deal about books that might spark

book study resources

Rob Bell, *Velvet Elvis* (Zondervan, 2005)

Shane Claiborne, *Irresistible Revolution* (Zondervan, 2007)

Donald Miller, *Blue Like Jazz* (Thomas Nelson, 2003)

Donald Miller, *Searching for God Knows What* (Thomas Nelson, 2004)

Arthur Simon, *How Much Is Enough?* (Baker Books, 2003)

conversation and address needs within a small group. Book studies are available at www.helwys.com/choice/index.html and www.relevantstore.com.

To make the books available to any who want to participate, our church purchases a group order to receive the discount rate. Group members then reimburse the church for their books, with the church subsidizing or paying in full when needed. We share an expectation with all participants that they will read selections for the upcoming discussion and prepare to share some of their affirmations and criticisms.

Our church also provides training for first-time facilitators. We guide them to write questions and underline parts in the readings for the upcoming week. Facilitators aren't expected to have all the answers, but to create an atmosphere for sharing. We try to utilize different facilitators for many of our study groups, which fosters the attitude that we all have something to bring to the table. Some books also lend themselves well to having a different member of the group facilitate

each week.

Study guides are especially helpful for first-time facilitators. Some authors include discussion questions. In addition, web searches can provide discussion/study guides posted by individuals who have led a study or by the author who posted questions.

The conversation doesn't have to end when the group leaves the coffee shop. Many times, questions and comments surface based on what other participants have shared. This is especially true for introverts who need time to process before sharing their insights.

Forums for discussion can be created in several formats. Our group uses www.facebook.com for participants, including those unable to attend a session, to post their thoughts or questions from the current readings and to continue the conversation.

Another discussion forum is a blog created just for your group using one of the many blog hosting sites (www.wordpress.com and www.blogger.com are free). Caleb's Cafe (www.calebscafe.com) offers the same type of services in addition to several other features specifically designed to assist Bible study groups.

Christian education happens in many settings and formats. A variety is needed to develop a holistic approach to discipleship. For some people, Sunday morning will never be a time where they are awake enough to be vulnerable and/or they find a Bible-based study daunting and irrelevant. A book study can help them bridge life and Scripture until they are able to see for themselves the unity of the two. A book study also provides leadership opportunities for those who have yet to discover the validity of their voice — even those without theological training or much church experience. **BT**

THE RESOURCE PAGE is provided by the Congregational Life office of the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship in partnership with *Baptists Today* and for those dedicated lay leaders working in the educational ministries of local churches. This month's page was written by Melissa Hatfield, associate pastor of youth and missions at First Baptist Church, Jefferson City, Mo. **Resource Page Archives are now available at <http://www.thefellowship.info/Resources/Church-Resources/Baptists-Today-resource-page>**