

"Fat Stoppers" Evangelism

Fat Stoppers.

Three times during the last 15 years, I lost a significant amount of weight with Fat Stoppers (a made-up name for a real program). For two years I was on the staff of Fat Stoppers, helping with meetings twice a week.

There was something about me that was different when I was an active Fat Stopper. Even as I was losing weight—before any goal was reached—acquaintances would come up to me and ask questions. "Are you losing weight? How?"

Talking about Fat Stoppers was easy and natural. "I'm on Fat Stoppers . . . I've lost 22¾ pounds . . . It's easy . . . It's good for you . . . We meet on Saturday mornings. . . ."

Sometimes I would ask the inquirer if she'd like to attend a meeting with me. "Just come and see if you like it," I'd say.

A couple of people did join Fat Stoppers after they talked to me. I always felt sort of responsible for them. "Call me with questions," I'd remind them. I'd check in on them once in awhile, just to see how things were going. I always seemed to do better with my personal goals



when I was helping someone else.

When Fat Stoppers get together, there are a lot of stories. Success stories. Stories about poor choices. "You mean I'm not the only one who ate her daughter's Halloween candy? What a relief!"

I never got dressed in the morning with the idea that "today I shall spread the

news about Fat Stoppers," but somehow the subject always seemed to come up. When I ordered my salad dressing on the side, someone would ask why. When a friend commiserated over a larger dress size, I'd say something like, "I know how that feels." And I'd tell her how Fat Stoppers made a difference in my life.

And even though I don't look much like a Fat Stopper anymore—for many reasons my dieting days are over—I still get questions about the program. "I heard you used to work for Fat Stoppers," a colleague will begin. "What's it like?"

God Lovers.

I'm learning that talking about God—witnessing, evangelism—is

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as easy as talking about Fat Stoppers, or any exciting job, program, sport or hobby. Let's look at just a few of the common threads. . . .

Something is different. Growing up in a small, mid-western town—with lots of (mostly Lutheran) churches—being Christian was almost a given.

It's different these days. Some of my nieces and nephews are not baptized. Not many of my neighbors are regular churchgoers. Few of my daughter's friends attend church or Sunday school.

Given the secularization of society, Christian practices are noticed. An electrician, looking for a time to come and do a repair, was amazed that we wouldn't be home on Sunday morning. One of my daughter's friends asked, "Why do you pray at mealtime?"

It makes a difference. When I talked about my weight loss, I rarely went into the fine details of the program. Instead, I would talk about the difference weight loss made in my life.

In the same way, witnessing is



not some detailed process requiring memorization of Bible verses. I'm learning that witnessing is as simple and non-threatening as telling how faith in Jesus makes a difference in my life.

The talk is easy and natural. Just as I never began the day wondering who I could get to join Fat Stoppers, I'm learning that

evangelism does not require me to lie in wait to pounce on unsuspecting atheists. The Spirit seems to create more than enough opportunities to speak of faith in the day-to-day goings-on of life.

It does seem easier to talk about the benefits of weight loss because they are so quantifiable: "I've lost 22¾ pounds!" But think about it: what is weight loss when compared to salvation? What is a dress size compared to grace? How do the ups and downs of a scale compare with the constancy of God's love?

Come join me in community. I thought nothing of inviting friends and strangers to join me at a Fat Stoppers class. "The leader is great!" I'd bubble. Admittedly, I am

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more shy about inviting friends and strangers to church.

You see how silly that shyness is, don't you? If my congregation means so much to me that I plan my week around its events, why would I want to keep this community a secret?

I try to remember that extending an invitation for someone to join me in worship is as easy as inviting them to join me at a movie. "Our Easter service is so beautiful," I could say. "Would you like to come with us?"

The stories. When people share their heartaches and heartjoys, their hopes, doubts and worries, they are sharing their "realness." People can be surprised and relieved to discover that believers have doubts, worries and, sometimes most surprisingly, a sense of humor. Just as it's a relief to know that someone else occasionally eats the Halloween candy, it's a relief to know that someone else occasionally falls asleep during prayers.

Relax. What if you tell someone your stories or invite them to



church and they continue to golf on Sunday mornings? Remember, you can plant seeds, but only God grows faith. I could tell someone about Fat Stoppers but could not lose weight for her. We can't get

so fearful of the results that we never tell our story, share our realness, or offer an invitation.

I used to say that witnessing was not my gift. Just seeing a member of the evangelism committee at church made me nervous. Lately, however, I'm getting more comfortable with the idea of witnessing. It helps me to realize that I "evangelize" about a lot of things—a lot of things not nearly as important as God's love for me! If I can talk about fat, I can talk about faith. If you can talk about the Girl Scouts, the bowling team, the garden club, the Chamber of Commerce, the _____ (you fill in the blank) then you, too, can witness to your faith.

Is your faith important to you? Does it make a difference in your life? Pass it on! ■

—Sue Edison-Swift