



*Leading Small Groups in the
Way of Jesus*

Available February 2014

\$16, 219 pages, paperback

978-0-8308-3681-9

Suffering from “Good Meeting Syndrome”?

One night about fifteen years ago, I left work to head to my small group. At the time I was coaching group leaders in the church, but this was the group in which I participated as a member. On the way I stopped for dinner, and while eating my calzone I realized I did not want to go. I felt guilty. I had been a small group staff pastor, I had led training seminars across the country on leading groups, and I was then the editor of a magazine for small group leaders. I was supposed to be committed to a group. I taught people how we needed one another. I wrote about God’s commands for us to love one another. However, that night I paid attention to something deep within me. I allowed myself to be honest. I ordered some baklava and went home.

Now skipping a group gathering for the sake of enjoying baklava might not seem like a big deal, but I’m the type of person who tends to do things out of a sense of duty and obligation. I was raised to go to meetings—especially church meetings—whether I wanted to or not. But this moment of honesty set me on a new path. It opened up space for me to look beneath all the activities so I could see what kind of life our groups were producing.

In this situation, the source of my angst was not the leader. I liked the couple that led the group. I enjoyed the people in the group. And I believed in the vision of the church. In addition, the group meetings were pretty good. We had good curriculum and meaningful discussions, and we were open for others to join us.

However, we had a disease. We suffered from what I’ve come to call “good meeting syndrome.” We were good for two hours on Thursday night, but our group didn’t have any life beyond that. People attended every week, but we fell short of experiencing anything more than Bible discussions, a few worship songs and some cookies. For many of us, a good weekly meeting was better than no meeting at all. But we had a vision for much more—a vision for loving one another, for making a difference in the world and for growing as disciples. And our good group meeting was not producing what we had hoped to experience.

As I work with churches, I find that many (if not most) groups suffer from good meeting syndrome: they’re good but not great. . . . In fact, when we’re honest, many of us will admit that we’re not looking for meetings at all. We might say we want a Bible study or a weekly meeting to attend, but in the deep places of our hearts we’re looking to find others with whom we can be our authentic selves. We long to love and be loved. We don’t often say it, but what we want is to find some people for whom we don’t have to perform to be accepted.

Leading good group meetings might be enough to carry a group forward in the early stages of its development, but it won’t be what causes a group to flourish and move into greatness. It won’t be the thing that causes people to want to give up their baklava and a quiet evening

 INTERVARSITY PRESS

Visit ivpress.com/media



FOR MORE INFORMATION AND TO SCHEDULE AN INTERVIEW CONTACT:

Krista Carnet, broadcast publicity, at 800.843.4587 ext. 4013 or kkcarnet@ivpress.com

Alisse Wissman, print publicity, at 800.843.4587 ext. 4059 or awissman@ivpress.com

ivpress.com/books



BOOK EXCERPT

M. Scott Boren is president of the Center for Community and Mission, a consulting and training ministry which helps churches develop effective small groups and equips leaders for missional church life. He is the author of numerous books, including *Missional Small Groups* and *Difference Makers: An Action Guide for Jesus Followers*.

mscottboren.com
 @mscottboren

at home. Good group meetings serve as doors to more – something Jesus describes after he has washed the feet of the disciples: “A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another” (John 13:34-35).

These words came at the end of a small group meeting led by Jesus – one that included washing feet, sharing a meal, Judas leaving with intentions of betrayal, and predictions that Peter would deny Jesus. This was more than a good meeting. In fact, by our standards today, it might fall short of a *good* group gathering. This was not a nice Bible study followed by prayer requests and cookies. It was messy. It was honest. It ended with more questions than answers. But it was *great*.

This group experience was more than a discussion about the ways of Jesus. It was a demonstration of the way Jesus wanted them to live. Jesus led his small group in the way of Jesus.

Sally’s story illustrates this shift. Sally had been told by her pastor that leading group members beyond a good meeting mentality meant people had to open up about their lives. They had to be transparent. So she led the way, moving beyond offering ideas and giving “right” answers to sharing how she fell short or struggled with the topic the group was discussing. But after six months of being the only one to do this, she was ready to give up and return to the old way. At that point she decided to give it one more shot.

Jeremy was a member who had never shared much about his life, but that night he opened up about how he was HIV-positive and had contracted the disease through promiscuous relationships. To his shock, the group gathered around him, wept with him, embraced him and committed to stand with him. That night two visitors were present at the group. One woman stood up and stated, “This is not for me,” and walked out. The other said, “If this is really the kind of people you are, I want to know more about this Jesus.”

This book is about finding your own version of Sally’s story. This is the story of what the Father-Son-Holy Spirit is doing in the midst of the world to restore life, community and his mission of love. . . . This is a story that God is writing in you, through you and around you. Welcome to the way of Jesus.

– Taken from the prelude, “From Good Small Group Meetings to Great Group Experiences”