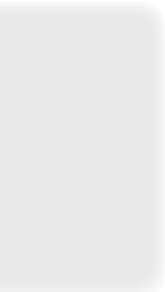


The Journey Together

**Taking Steps
Toward Community,
Maturity & Mission**

M. Scott Boren



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Read Before the First Meeting

I remember my first small group. I actually remember it very well. We still get together every Christmas and summer. My wife and I load up our van full of the energy of our children, some toys to keep them occupied along with lots of DVDs, and we head south from Minnesota to Texas. There we talk with, eat with, and share time with my first small group. It started out as just three of us but then after a couple of years another was added. Then 26 years later a fifth and a sixth. Now this small group is not so small. When we get together, there is lots of noise as twelve of us share our lives with one another.

By now you may have guessed that my first small group is actually my immediate family, and it grew as my sister and I married and had children. The family unit illustrates the importance of small group connections. The way God wired us biologically demonstrates the most basic nature of how we are connected to each other. Some think that small groups are just a nice way to do church or find a few friends, but they are much more than that. Or at least they can be. Being connected with a few friends is foundational to life itself. We are born into a small group, and we flourish when we do life in healthy ways with a group of a few people.

Of course, many look back on their experiences with their immediate family with less than fond memories. In some cases people had this first small group experience taken away from them. Others wished they had a different kind of first small group. But this does not mean that the small group environment is less important. Actually, the opposite is true. The enemy of our souls, Satan, knows that if he can undermine the life and health of our most basic small group that many lives will be destroyed. And we can see this all over the place in our society today.

Relating to people in small groups is how we are designed. We are wired to connect. But that does not mean that all of us are accomplished connectors. Most of us have had our fair share of hurt and pain from close relationships. And if we were to be honest, most of us have been the source of that pain inflicted upon others. There is no magical experience found in joining a small group, just as there is no magic in simply getting together with family members. Families and small groups can be the small unit of life where we experience the love that God intended. The magic—if there is such a thing in group life—is found as we grow in love for God and one another.

Over the years, I have observed group after group gather with great enthusiasm in the first few weeks. And then the members really start getting to know one another and the excitement wanes. Most of the time, there is no incident that would cause alarm. The group members just become cool toward one another and develop a distance. They become nice. They learn to talk about Christian things. They continue to give updates about their lives. They might even have really good Bible studies. However, they are not growing in love. They share some of the same air every week but they hide behind invisible walls of self-protection.

Many pastors and writers on community have made similar observations. Many have challenged and confronted this pattern with great gusto. The alternative they propose is usually a radical vision for ultimate transparency and a high commitment to community. In my experience, few people will embrace such a challenge because their personalities are not prone to experiment with new ideas. But most of us—especially when it comes to relationships—find that to be too big of a leap. Most of us need small steps that will lead us into new experiences of connecting with others. Any talk of transparency, radical community, and huge time commitments might look appeal-

ing in an ideal world, but when we look at things realistically we know that we are not quite ready for it. Most of us are not looking for a huge mountain called “community” to climb. We can only deal with the next step of connecting and when we continue to take those steps in healthy ways, we find that we are well on the way up the community mountain which might otherwise seem daunting and impossible.

In reality, this seems to fit with the way God works. He does not often reveal the full journey to us. He announces the big goal: the kingdom of God where his rule of love is completely fulfilled. However, he does not tell us exactly how that will come about. Nor does he reveal how we will participate in it. When Jesus was preparing his disciples for his departure he said, “All this I have spoken to you while still with you. But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you” (John 14:25-26). These verses are set in the middle of Jesus teaching his disciples about loving and keeping his commandments. When I imagine myself as one of the disciples on that day, I think I would have been quite frustrated. I would have wanted a clear game plan and some concrete instructions. But instead he tells the disciples to live in love and obey what he says.

Yet this is exactly the point. Disciples of Jesus are those who learn to depend upon him, through the power of the Holy Spirit, on the journey. He does not hand out marching orders and then tell us to make them happen. He tells us to love, obey and then allow the Spirit to help us to love and obey.

This is the journey of following Jesus. It is a journey of growing in love for others with whom we share community. It’s more than attending small group meetings every week, but for most it begins there. It’s a journey of growing up with one another in maturity. We follow Jesus in his mission and move together in this world.

Some small groups enter this journey and take off with the Spirit’s power to love. Others never get off the ground. Most have lots of ups and downs. As I look back on all the small groups that have been a part of my journey, I can see how I have experienced all three kinds. Some were full of remarkable experiences that you want to hold onto forever. Others I want to forget. But most were full of the normal ups and downs of life. We struggled together on the journey trying to figure out how to love one another in the midst of the ups and downs.

All of these group experiences shaped me as a part of my journey. I began doing small groups thinking that the goal was to have the small group high every week, with remarkable encounters with God, new people added, and spectacular testimonies. But now I realize that only spiritual adrenaline junkies can actually do groups this way. Most of the journey of growing in love for God and one another is actually found in the very normal stuff of life. It’s just normal stuff done differently as the Holy Spirit empowers us to love.

When You Meet

As you meet, you will be using the outline for the group provided in this book. But there is a basic format to group meeting that helps people get connected more easily to one another and to God. It is easily remembered with the four W's: Welcome, Worship, Word, and Work.

Welcome: For each week, you will see an opening activity that is designed to help the group connect with one another. For most people it is hard to enter into a group time and dive into deep Bible discussion or open up about their lives. Most need a simple way to "prime the relational pump."

Worship: Different groups will do worship in different ways. Some will sing songs to a worship CD or with someone in the group who plays the guitar, if you are so lucky to have one. Others will read a Psalm or have a time of silence and reflection. Try different things and see what works for your group. These lessons do not provide specific direction about how to do worship. If you need help, contact your pastor or coach to get some ideas.

Word: This is the time when there is Bible discussion, group processing, and prayer for one another. In this curriculum, you will be watching two short video segments with a processing time in the middle.

Work: Yes, there will be some work to do between the meetings. But the work is not homework or anything like that. It is "love" work that will allow you to connect with one another in different ways. It will open up opportunities for you to see how God is at work in your lives in ways that you probably don't expect.

As you walk through the lessons over the next few weeks, you will be talking together about the journey of connecting with one another. The goals of these lessons include:

- Providing information about what it means to commit to a group so that each individual can make a decision about whether he or she will participate.
- Helping people get on the same page about the purpose of the group.
- Identifying how people will contribute to the life of the group.
- Introducing the reality that everyone is different and how that impacts the way groups form.

There are many different kinds of small groups. These lessons are designed to help a new group or a group that has been meeting on a short-term basis move into the next leg of the journey. As a first step in the process, take some time and write the names of all the people in your group below.

Now call out each name aloud, one at a time. After you have said a name, take 30 seconds to be silent. Think about that person. Ask Jesus to bless that person today. Ask God to give you love for that person. Write down any thoughts or impressions as you do this.

After you have done this, read this Psalm aloud:

How wonderful, how beautiful, when brothers and sisters get along!
It's like costly anointing oil
 flowing down head and beard,
Flowing down Aaron's beard,
 flowing down the collar of his priestly robes.
It's like the dew on Mount Hermon
 flowing down the slopes of Zion.
Yes, that's where God commands the blessing,
 ordains eternal life. (Psalm 133)

Take a few minutes to write down any reflections or thoughts that come to mind after reading this Psalm.

Week 1

Why Connect on the Journey

Before the Meeting

Personal Reflection: Why Connect?

(Please Read Before the Group Meeting)

The Bible is full of journey metaphors. One of the most clear is written by the Apostle Paul in Philippians:

Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already arrived at my goal, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. Brothers and sisters, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus (Philippians 3:12-14).

Paul envisioned his walk with God as a journey toward the goal of knowing Christ. This is clearly seen in the verses before those quoted above. He wanted to know Christ in the “participation in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death.” I have read this verse many, many times and I would always say the proper thing about it, but secretly I would wonder if Paul just had a death wish. In turn, I wondered if real followers of Jesus liked to suffer.

Suffering is scary. If I’m honest with myself, I really want a comfortable life with as little suffering as possible. I don’t want to endure the pain that Jesus felt on the cross, and I don’t want to suffer just because I am supposed to. I certainly don’t want to be like the monk in the movie, *The Davinci Code*, who flogs and cuts himself so that he shares in Christ’s suffering. In all honesty, I wonder why suffering even has to happen, especially if it’s the kind of suffering portrayed in Hollywood.

But my perspective began to change as I discovered the reason behind the suffering of Jesus. He did not suffer for the sake of suffering. There is no glory in suffering for its own sake. He suffered because of love. Paul wanted to participate in the suffering of Jesus so that he might know the love of Jesus all that much more. If this meant that Paul would become like Jesus in his death, it would be out of an experience of becoming like Jesus—as much as it is possible for a sinful human—in the love of Jesus. To know Jesus Christ is to know love. For “God is love” (1 John 3:16) and Jesus is the perfect expression of God (Heb. 1:1-3).

We can see this in another letter of Paul’s:

For this reason I kneel before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth derives its name. I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the Lord’s holy people, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God. (Ephesians 3:14-19).

This prayer points out that when Christ dwells in our hearts that we will be established in love, love for God and for others (Matthew 22:34-36). When you put this prayer together with the journey metaphor from Philippians, we could conclude that the journey of following Jesus is about growing in love.

For many this is a different perspective on what it means to be a Christ-follower or the more common term “disciple.” Some have seen discipleship through the lens of personal morality. For them, the test of a good Christian is about whether or not they don’t do certain things. Others have based their walk with Christ on their personal experiences with God. For them the test of a good Christian is about how much they pray, go to church, and have personal devotions. Still others base their Christian faith on how much they know about God. For them, Bible knowledge and theology becomes essential to discipleship.

But Jesus said that the core to everything is to love God and love others as oneself. If this is the case, then being a disciple, a follower of Jesus, means that we are becoming more like him in his love for his Father and love for others. We might have personal struggles. We might not be the most “spiritual” person around. We might not have all of our theology lined up right. But everyone can grow in love for God and others.

This is where a circle of friends comes into the picture. It is hard to grow in love by oneself. John wrote “Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. No one has ever seen God; but if we love one another, God lives in us and his love is made complete in us.” When the love of God is in us, we share that love with others in community.

We connect with others so that we can learn to love others as God loves us. As we connect, we discover that we receive the love of God through others. We need each other in order to fully experience God’s love for us.

Of course, we have to learn to love as God loves, but that’s the reason it is a journey. This means that we will trip and fall as we go on the journey, but as we forgive one another along the way, we will discover that we are being established in love and that Christ dwells in us in new ways.

Personal Reflection

- Take a few minutes and pray about what you’ve just read.

- When you’re ready, write below some of your thoughts and reflections:

Purpose of this Week's Study

During this first week, you will be introduced to the purpose of this curriculum. Then you will explore the question of why relationships are so crucial to being Christ followers and to discipleship (Loving God, Ourselves, Others and Creation). You will process how life-on-life action is personally transforming and how we must move beyond simply focusing on Bible information. The practical activity for the week will be about developing conversation skills and listening skills. The homework will be an assignment to practice listening by asking people to connect during the week.

Preparation for the Meeting

Someone will need to secure a package of paper plates-the cheap kind work best—and a box of markers.

Bring the DVD to the meeting and make sure that the host has the equipment needed to play the DVD during the meeting.

Meeting Agenda**Welcome-Opening Activity**

The picture below illustrates typical ways that people tend to present themselves in a group context. Of course, these are extreme images. Talk about a few of the people depicted, maybe even giving them names i.e. “know-it-all Bob” or “sob-story Helene.”



Welcome-Opening Activity (Cont.)

- Now pass out a paper plate and markers to everyone in the group. Take about 5 minutes to draw how you present yourself in a group context. Use your imagination as much as you want.
- Each person shares what they drew and why they drew it.
- Reflect together on how the way we present ourselves to one another in community impacts our discipleship.

Worship

Spend some time connecting to God in whatever way works for your group.

Word

Video Teaching: Relationships and Discipleship

- Identify the purpose of the group
- Relational Christianity
- Relationships are the context for discipleship
- We cannot separate how we relate to God from how we relate to one another.

Group Processing Time

- Take a moment to review your personal reflections from the reading. Is there anything that you would like to share with the group?
- Why are relationships so crucial to our growth in Christ?
- Why do we typically associate discipleship with Bible knowledge and not with how we love one another?
- Why do you think that this group is called a Journey Group?
- How do you feel about the fact that this group won't be focused solely on Bible Study, but will actually invite us to open up to one another and minister to one another?

Video Teaching #2: Listening to One Another

- To enter this journey, we must learn to listen to one another.
- “He who answers before listening—that is his folly and his shame.”—Prov. 18:13
- “To ‘listen’ another’s soul into a condition of disclosure and discovery may be almost the greatest service that any human being ever performs for another.” (Douglas Steens in Sofield, 153).
- “Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry.”
—James 1:19

- Guidelines for listening
 - Show interest in the other person’s interests
 - Ask questions like
 - What has been the highlight of the last few days?
 - What do you do on an average day?
 - Have you done anything lately for fun?
 - Refuse to respond with statements like
 - “I used to do that.”
 - “I know someone who is like you.”
 - Keep the focus on the other person, not on what you know.
 - Ask follow up questions.
 - Focus on that person like they are the only person in the room.

Prayer

- Take a few minutes and pray with each other about your week.
- Take time to also pray for your group and what God is doing for each of you through the group.

Work

Homework: Meet for coffee (dessert, lunch or whatever works) with one other person of the same gender in the group during the next week and put listening into action. For those who have experience with this, it won’t feel awkward. The conversation will simply go back and forth. But for those who have not developed this skill, it is often best to simply flip a coin and one person shares while the other listens and then after 20 minutes switch.

Week 2

Leading Connections that Move

Before the Meeting

Reflection: What Leadership Is and What It Is Not

(Please Read Before the Group Meeting)

I remember my first foray into leading a group. As our meeting night drew closer each week, my stress level would rise. I desperately wanted my group to work well. I wanted my group members to have a good experience. I wanted them to come back. I wanted our group to make an impact upon others. During the day before the meeting I would pray—usually due to my stress—and I would prepare. I would show up with all “my ducks in a row” and lead the meeting. After we were all gone, I could finally relax. To be honest, my favorite part of the week was the few hours after the group meeting before I went to bed. There was no stress then.

Now this bit of transparency might reveal some of my personal neuroses, but I have since learned that the stress that I was feeling was primarily based upon a myth about what good leadership is all about. And while most do not respond the way I did, I have found that many buy into the same myth that plagued me. Good leaders are, supposedly, super stars with great gifts and/or incredible dedication that leads to success. I’ve found that this myth is based upon the assumption that the best pastors of churches have to be super stars. So the best small group leaders have to be mini-super stars.

Super stars are successful, but I have since learned that small group success is not the goal of leadership. The words of Henri Nouwen help guide us in a different direction:

Success comes from control, strength and respectability. A successful person has the ability to create something, to keep control over its development, and to make it available in large quantities. Success brings many rewards and often fame. ... Fruits however, come from weakness and vulnerability. And fruits are unique. A child is the fruit conceived in vulnerability, community is the fruit born through shared brokenness, and intimacy is the fruit that grows through touching one another’s wounds.

I have since learned that good small group leaders are not super stars. The best small group leaders work against the grain of the myth of a successful leader. In fact, I have found that the best small groups do not revolve around solo leaders. There are no individuals who create, control and make group life available. Jesus stated, “For where two or three gather in my name, there am I with them.” Jesus sent out the disciples in Luke 11 in pairs. The Apostle Paul and other first century leaders ministered in teams. A biblical principle of Jesus’ kind of leadership is always team leadership. And this is no different when we are looking at group leadership.

Core team members carry some responsibilities. They should help the group discern direction of the group. They should help the group stay focused to their purpose. In addition, a core team leader should help resolve conflict in the group. There are many other responsibilities that a core team leader should have, and your group should discuss what a core team member looks like. Not every person that is a core team member will have these gifts, but as a team, they should fit all of your criteria. Also, remember that a core team member is meant to serve the group, not dominate the group.

Think about the people in your group. There is probably one person that you assume to be the leader. This might be the host of your short-term group. It might be the person you think has the strongest personality or the one who has served the most in church leadership positions. Do away with that thought. That is not the way forward. Think in terms of a team of two or three people who bring a lot of different contributions to the group. If there is one, it is too easy for that person to step to the center of the group. But when two or three take the lead, they must point to Jesus. As soon as you think one person, the group will revolve around that person and not the presence of Jesus. And besides, God wants to do much more through your group than any one person can carry. We don't need super star leaders. We need people who will all pitch in and follow the leading of the Spirit.

Personal Reflection

- Take a few minutes and pray about what you've just read.

- When you're ready, write below some of your thoughts and reflections:

Purpose of this Study

This week will help the entire group understand group leadership and think through who is called to lead. It also will introduce a team concept of group leadership and identify different roles people could do. The homework this week is to make plans to connect over a meal in a home with another group member.

Preparation for the Meeting

Someone will need to prepare the worship time.

Bring the DVD to the meeting and make sure that the host has the equipment needed to play the DVD during the meeting.

Group Meeting Agenda

Welcome-Opening Activity

Debrief Homework:

- How did it feel to meet and listen to the other person?
- Did you feel like you were listening differently?
- How did it feel to meet and share your life with the other person?
- In what ways did you feel listened to?

Worship

Word

Video Teaching-Group Leadership

- Typical patterns in most groups: Solo Leadership
- The results of these patterns
- The principle of 2-3
- The importance of a core team

Group Processing Time

- Take a moment to review your personal reflections from the reading. Is there anything you would like to share with the group?
- What is the value of shared leadership?
- What are the qualities that you would look for in a core team member?
- Why is personality driven leadership something that would lead us down the wrong path?
- There are other roles beyond the core team. Look at the list of potential roles that could be played in your group on the next page. What is the advantage to share responsibility in this way?

Teaching #2: The Importance of hospitality

Prayer

- Take a few minutes and pray with each other about your week.
- Take time to also pray for your group and what God is doing for each of you through the group.

Work

Homework

- Process this: Who here is willing to open their home up and invite someone over for a simple meal? Schedule times when people can get together in homes in twos or threes.

The roles on the next page are suggestions only and not requirements. They are here to stimulate your thinking of possible roles for all of the group members, and you can add other roles to those below. People may serve in multiple roles. Do not decide your leaders tonight, as you will do that in week 5. Discuss which roles might work for your group, and also think of some other roles that your group may want.

Core Team Member Roles:

Following your group processing time, what are some of the criteria for your core team member team? List them in the space below. Core team members may have other roles as well (see next page), but should fit your criteria as a group.

Meeting Roles:

Study Champion: Helps plan future studies and/or serves as one of the facilitators.

Worship Champion: Leads group in worship during meetings, with or without an instrument.

Host/Hostess: Coordinates the meeting places; arrives 15 minutes early to meetings to welcome others

Timekeeper: Gently ensures the meetings begin and end according to the time upon which the group agreed.

Food Champion: Keeps a schedule of who will provide refreshments and snacks.

Kid's Slot Champion: Coordinates who will work with the children each week.

Group Life Roles:

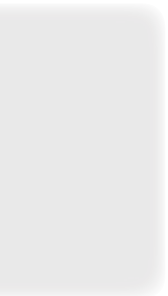
Prayer Champion: Encourages prayer and keeps a prayer journal.

Communication Champion: Calls or emails group members to communicate important information.

Social Champion: Plans, involves others and delegates for parties and other times when the group gathers socially.

Engagement Champion: Leads prayer for neighbors, friends, co-workers and family members who need to experience God's love. Challenges group to demonstrate God's love in tangible ways. Not a matchmaker for group members.

Service Champion: Plans group serving opportunities.



Week 3:

A Journey of Mission

Before the Meeting

Personal Reflection: Being Salt and Light

(Please Read Before the Group Meeting)

Jesus said, "You are the salt of the earth. ... You are the light of the world."
—Matthew 5:13-14

Salt does not have to try to be salty. It is what it is. It adds flavor and enhances the food it touches. It also serves as a preservative, keeping food safe to eat for longer than would be possible without it. But you don't eat salt for the sake of eating salt. We don't ever plan our meals and include salt as one of the items to eat, but salt is always there.

Light is similar to salt in some ways. Light reveals what is present, allowing us to navigate the physical obstacles of life without hitting them. Without light we would stumble and fall in all kinds of ways. Without light we could not see the beauty of the world. Nor could we enjoy the various colors of life. But rarely do we ever think about light. Light allows us to see but we don't actually look at light itself.

We are the salt of the earth and the light of the world. Because we belong to God, we bring something essential to the world that makes a significant difference. The difference we make is not because we try to convert everyone we know, forcing Christianity upon them. That would be like pouring salt down someone's throat or shining a car light into someone's eyes. Nor do we make a difference because we get involved in all kinds of social projects, even though those can be good things. We are salt and light that makes a difference in the world because we allow love to flow through us in a way that the world around us gets to see.

We offer salt and light to the world in the ways we live and love. The question for us then is two-fold: first, are we growing in love, for God and others? Second, are we relating to people around us in a way that they can see us growing in love? Do our neighbors, friends, co-workers, and family members see our lives enough to observe the love growing in us?

Part of being people of love is about making space in our lives for people around us. But often we race through life and miss the fact that a neighbor experienced a tragic loss or a co-worker is in need of a friend. Sometimes, it is someone much closer like a family member or close friend. When we open our eyes to people around us, we see things we most often overlook: the needs, the concerns, and the loneliness. These are the places where God is inviting us to be salt and light.

It is much easier to be this salt and light when we are doing so as a group. If you learn of a neighbor in need, asking the group to walk with you in loving this person, even if it's only to pray, can be very freeing. Too often, we think about ministering to friends as individuals, but when that neighbor gets to meet others who are growing in love, the impact of the salt and light is multiplied.

As you look forward to establishing your group, one key question is, “How does God want to love and make a difference through us towards the world? Asking this question will challenge a group to look beyond itself and the needs within the group to see how God might move through the group members.

Personal Reflection

- Take a few minutes and pray about what you’ve just read.

- When you’re ready, write below some of your thoughts and reflections:

Purpose of this Study

This week will introduce the holistic experience that embraces all of how God works in our lives, not just one aspect of our walk with Christ. Many groups focus on one thing like fellowship or Bible study. Growth in love happens best when we are connected with others in a broader way. This study illustrates this holistic experience with three parts: Communion with God together, Community within the group and Engagement in the neighborhood. In this lesson, you will be guided to pray for your neighbors and talk about how you can be light to people you know who live near you.

Preparation for the Meeting

Someone should bring a computer and bring up www.41q.com on the browser. That person should be prepared to explain what people will be doing at this website before the next meeting.

Group Meeting Agenda

Welcome: Opening Activity

Ice Breaker Question: What is your favorite kind of food?

Debrief Homework:

- For those who have had the opportunity, talk about the experience of sharing a meal together.
- Why is eating together important?

Worship

Word

Video teaching

- Various kinds of small group experience
- Holistic small groups
- Three key parts
 - Communion with God
 - Relating in Community
 - Engagement in the Neighborhood

Discussion

- Take a moment to review your personal reflection of the reading. Is there anything you would like to share with the group?
- In what ways is being salt and light done through words? What about through actions?
- Envision groups you have been a part of in the past. What did they look like?
- How is this vision of a journey group similar to what you have experienced before?
- How is it different?
- What are some of the advantages of the vision of journey groups?
- What will be the greatest challenge to you if you participate in such a vision?
- How might such a group positively impact your life?

Teaching Part #2

Prayer

- Take a few minutes and pray with each other about your week.
- Take time to also pray for your group and what God is doing for each of you through the group.

Work

Process these questions

- Who is one person in your life who might need a touch from Jesus that you can have a more meaningful conversation with this week? (If you cannot think of anyone, consider a neighbor that lives close to you.)
- How might such a conversation happen?
- Come next week with the name of this person, even if you don't get an opportunity to talk with them.

Homework #2

Go to www.41q.com and take the free personality quiz. Print out the one paragraph summary of the conclusions and bring it to the group next week. If someone does not have a computer then talk amongst yourselves about how those with a computer might serve others that don't.

Week 4

Differences on the Journey

Before the Meeting

Personal Reflection

(Please Read Before the Group Meeting)

We can take the analogy, men are from Mars; women are from Venus, a step further when we are talking about small groups. Imagine that Mars and Venus are not planets like the Earth, but are comprised of millions of small planets. All the men have their own little Mars to live on and each woman has their own Venus. From our own little planets, we each see the rest of the universe according to our unique perspective. We talk from that perspective. We listen to others from that perspective. And we try to relate with others from all the other little planets who each see things a bit differently.

Of course, Mars and Venus are not made up of millions of small planets, but it is true that each of us sees the world very differently. Even people who share similar personalities see and experience life in unique ways. You can search the world over and you will never find someone who is exactly like you. The way God made you, your life experience, your physical make-up, your interests, your preferences, and your personality make you, well, you. You will never be replicated.

Think about the people in your group. Who is the most different from you? How are they different? Do those differences frustrate you? Do you see how their perspective might be just as valid as yours?

Now think about the person who is most like you. How are they like you? What do you share with that person? How do your similarities impact you? Is there frustration? Is there a sense of joy about the fact that there is someone similar?

No matter how similar or different we are, as you walk on the journey of connecting, the differences will become evident. This is what happens when we get to know one another. You cannot avoid the differences. Many groups don't continue on the journey together because individuals conclude that they don't have enough in common with other members. They look for people who don't frustrate them or are easy to connect with. They want people who are like themselves. Often such people jump from one set of relationships to another because they never find the people they want.

If you look, you will find that God is actually right in the middle of the differences. In the differences is where the Spirit of God is at work to change and grow us in love. Most of the time, we cannot control who is near us. And when we do try, we miss out on the opportunity to love and be loved by people who are different from us.

As you walk on the journey with others, the question you will face is whether or not you will embrace the differences. I'm not saying that doing so will always be easy. Often it's quite messy. You will feel misunderstood. You may want to run away. You may want to blame or judge. But if you press through those initial reactions, you will find God meeting you in the skin of that person who is different.

Personal Reflection

- Take a few minutes and pray about what you've just read.

- When you're ready, write below some of your thoughts and reflections:

Purpose of this Study

This lesson will help you process your group's personality differences and use that as a springboard to talk about conflict. It will provide some concrete healthy patterns for navigating relationships. It will introduce the need to commit to a default of trust if all of you are going to move forward as a group. The homework will focus on praying about the group and the commitment to the next stage of the group's life.

Preparation for the Meeting

Every group member should visit www.41q.com and complete the questions.

Group Meeting Agenda

Welcome: Opening Activity

Debrief Homework:

- Who is one person in your life that needs a touch from Jesus?
- Can anyone share about how you had a different kind of conversation with such a person this week?

(Note: For some this will prove to be challenging and maybe a bit overwhelming. The point of this exercise is to help people experience that a journey group is more than just an inward-focused club. We are all on a journey and some will be quick to jump in and others will need to warm up to the experience even though they are completely behind the idea.)

Worship

Word

Discussion

- Each person should read aloud the summary paragraph about their personalities that they printed out.
- After reading them, identify those who are the most alike. Group people who have similar traits.

Video teaching

Discussion

- Take a moment to review your personal reflection of the reading. Is there anything you would like to share with the group?
- What are some of the ways that your personality might frustrate other people?
- What are some things about others that can cause conflict with you?
- How do you typically respond to situations when there is frustration between you and a friend?

Video Teaching #2

- The way of the world is to avoid, blame, judge, and run or just be nice with one another.
- Learn to work through our frustrations with each other.
- Some basic principles
 - Running away is not an option
 - Sharing our point of view without judgment
 - Listening to the other's perspective
 - Forgiveness

Prayer

- Take a few minutes and pray with each other about your week.
- Take time to also pray for your group and what God is doing for each of you through the group.

Work

Homework

- Pray this week about your commitment to the group.
- Are you willing to commit to the relationships in this group for the next 3-4 months?
- What will you have to change about your life to keep this commitment?
- How will you have to respond to conflict differently in order to keep this commitment?

Week 5

Committing to the Journey

Before the Meeting

Personal Reflection: Where Do We Go From Here?

(Please Read Before the Group Meeting)

I played baseball in high school. When the cool weather started lifting and the days got longer, my sense of anticipation would heighten. I could not wait to get my glove out and get on the field. For the first few weeks of practice, there were a few who were testing things out, trying to see if they were going to commit to the game. Coach would try us out in different positions, and we would see who would be invited to stay with the team. During this time, one or two would determine that they were not that interested and they would stop showing up at practices.

Then came the week of the first game. The team roster would be announced and uniforms handed out. Up to that point, the players were seeing if they wanted to play. But when we were handed a uniform, we knew we were committing to the team.

Now is the time when you get to decide if you want a small group uniform. Of course there is no literal uniform, but you get to decide if you want to move forward with this group. When I took a uniform to play baseball, I was making an agreement with my team that I would participate in practices and give my all to win the games on the schedule. We had to count the cost up front so that we would know what to expect of one another.

At this point of the journey together, you are being invited to join a small group team, agreeing to support one another. When groups don't make such an agreement, individuals can choose to participate however they desire. And no one really knows what they can expect from others. Often when the relationships in the group get difficult, individuals will choose not to show up, hoping that their absence will make things better.

This does not mean that you are committing to some kind of permanent group. Rarely do groups last forever in healthy ways. We are simply inviting the group to commit to the next leg of this group's journey. This will mean that you are looking at committing to be a group for three to six months, depending upon the time of the year. The key is to be clear about your commitment so that everyone understands.

Personal Reflection

- Take a few minutes and pray about what you've just read.

- When you're ready, write below some of your thoughts and reflections:

Purpose of this Study

This last night would include a meal. It would be a time to celebrate what has transpired and a time to talk about what's next. There will be some practical tools to help the group develop ground rules and invite everyone to commit to some kind of specific role.

Preparation for the Meeting

Look over the group agreement that is in this lesson. Pray about the various parts of it. Be prepared to talk through this agreement and openly process it with the rest of the group.

Group Meeting Agenda

Welcome-Opening Activity

A Meal Together

While eating or right after eating, talk about the following questions:

- What has been the most meaningful aspect of participating in this group?
- How has God changed you through the relationships in this group?

Worship

Word

Video Teaching

Discussion

- Take a moment to review your personal reflection of the reading. Is there anything you would like to share with the group?
- Talk about the things that you processed as individuals or couples in the homework from last week.
- Work through the chart on page 18 and talk about who feels led to do what.
- Who are the two or three who feel led to work together to serve the group as leaders?

Video Teaching #2

- What is a group agreement?
- How to talk about a group agreement.

Prayer

- Take a few minutes and pray with each other about your week.
- Take time to also pray for your group and what God is doing for each of you through the group.

Discussion

[Take a look at the group agreement on the following pages and discuss what your group agreement will look like]

Small Group Agreement

A small group agreement helps a group of people clarify how they are going to live in love with one another by defining the expectations of how the group will operate. The following includes some basic elements to help you talk about the things around which you want to agree. Feel free to modify or add to it. It is broken into four sections: 1) Technical Details, 2) Directional Parameters, 3) Patterns of Participation, and 4) Group Role Assignments.

1) Technical Details:

- We will meet on _____ (day of the week).
- We will meet for _____ weeks, after which we will decide if we wish to continue as a group.
- We will meet from _____ to _____ and we will strive to start on time and end on time.
- We will meet at _____ (place) or we will rotate from house to house.

2) Directional Parameters (based on the topics studied during Journey Together)

(Check if you can agree to participate in this way):

- I will value the relationships in this group outside of the weekly meetings.
- I will contribute to the life of this group by supporting the idea of team leadership.
- I will contribute my gifts to the life of the group.
- I will work through relational conflict that will surely arise.
- I will begin to build relationships with a person or two who needs a touch of God's love.
- Other: _____

3) Patterns of Participation: (Check if you can agree to participate in this way):

- PRIORITY: We will make group meetings a priority in our lives.
- PARTICIPATION: Everyone is encouraged to participate. However, we will not allow any one person to dominate.
- RESPECT: Everyone is given the right to their own opinions, and all questions are encouraged and respected.
- CONFIDENTIALITY: Anything that we share in the meeting will not be repeated outside the meeting.
- CARE: Permission is given to call upon each other at anytime, especially in times of crisis. We will care for each other.
- CHALLENGE: We will care enough about each other to challenge one another to keep the commitments that we have made.
- Other: _____

Roles

Remember that not all of these spots need to be filled. As a group, determine what roles you would like filled for your group, and assign members of the group to these roles. Core team members can fill other roles as well.

Core Team Member (2-4 people):

Core Team Member #1: _____

Core Team Member #2: _____

Core Team Member #3: _____

Core Team Member #4: _____

Meeting Roles:

Study Champion: _____

Worship Champion: _____

Host/Hostess: _____

Timekeeper: _____

Food Champion: _____

Kid's Slot Champion: _____

Other: _____

Group Life Roles:

Prayer Champion: _____

Communication Champion: _____

Social Champion: _____

Engagement Champion: _____

Service Champion: _____

Other: _____

In Closing

Thank you for participating in this group. We hope that it was informative and foundational for you and your group's fellow members. Be sure to take some time in the future and review this material so that your group can stay on top of potential problems.

If you choose not to participate in this group in the future, please contact the coach of the group or the associate pastor in charge of small groups. We would love to hear your feedback about the group, and also help you find another group if you so desire.

Finally, know that you are not alone on this journey. Your coach would love to help find new directions for your group if you are having trouble finding a next step. Be sure to stretch outside of your comfort zones from time to time, as this is where we can trust God and grow in our trouble areas. If you have any questions or feedback, please don't hesitate to contact your coach or the associate pastor in charge of small groups.

God Bless Your Group As It Journeys Together

Notes



M. Scott Boren is the President of The Center for Community and Mission (www.mscottboren.com), and consultant who partners with the Missional Network (www.themissionalnetwork.com). He serves as the Equipping Pastor at Hosanna Church in Houston, TX. He has written and co-written eight books, including *Introducing the Missional Church*, *Missional Small Groups* and *MissioRelate*. He shares life with his bride, Shawna, and their four children, all under the age of eight.