

# This Is Group

*A Group Leader's Guide*



## CONTENTS

---

### *Section 1—Story*

- Foreword **5**
- 1 Stepping Up **6**
- 2 Getting Started **10**
- 3 Embracing Each Other **16**
- 4 Asking for Advice **21**
- 5 Serving Together **26**
- 6 Equipping New Leaders **29**
- 7 Exceeding Expectations **32**

### *Section 2—Reference Guide*

- 8 Following Jesus **40**
- 9 Encountering God **42**
- 10 Embracing Others **44**
- 11 Engaging the World Around Us **46**
- 12 Expand God's Kingdom **48**
- 13 Facilitation **50**
- 14 Weekend Discussion Guide **52**
- 15 Real People, Real Problems, Real Love **54**
- 16 Value the Process **56**



## FOREWORD

---

Welcome to *This is Group* – a two-part guide for most everything a Faith Promise Group Leader needs to be successful. This guide is a companion resource along with the *This is Group* training videos which are available at <https://faithpromise.org/groups/training>.

The first part of this guide is an original story written by one of our own, Rachel Holbrook. Through this story, our goal is for leaders to enjoy and experience the essence of group-life while gaining real life insight, valuable wisdom, and key practices to use in your groups. Also, we hope the story provides a common language to communicate with us, other leaders, and those not yet in groups.

The second part is a reference guide which provides specific details and a helpful toolbox for group leaders serving at any level. Although the material in this guide is hardly exhaustive, when enhanced by the power of the Holy Spirit, your own spiritual growth insights, and the support provided by the Groups leadership support structure, we believe that you will be more than qualified to lead a Faith Promise group.

We hope you enjoy both this guide and the *This is Group* video discussions. Thank you for taking part in this rewarding and redeeming story of following Jesus and leading others to do the same!

—YOUR FPGROUPS TEAM

## Stepping Up

The room buzzed with conversation and the clatter of dishes as everyone filled their plates with food and moved from the kitchen to the back deck. Tyler felt a strong hand clap him on the shoulder and turned to greet his Group Coach, Evan. “Hey, Man! You made it.”

“Just in time, it looks like.” Evan grinned. “Is there anything left?”

Tyler grabbed two sodas from the fridge and offered one to his mentor.

“There’s more in the fridge, and Alex is outside grilling hot dogs.”

“Thanks.” The older man accepted the drink and looked through the kitchen windows toward the group gathered on the deck. “I’m proud of you, Tyler. You’ve done a phenomenal job with this group.”

“Thanks,” Tyler grabbed his wife by the waist as she attempted to squeeze past them on her way outside, “but I couldn’t have done it without Kelsey.”

“Agreed.” Evan winked at Kelsey. “I assume you did most of the work.”

“Oh, of course!” Kelsey laughed. Looking for Evan’s wife, she asked, “Where’s Maggie?”

“She got waylaid by the little guys outside. I should probably go rescue her.” Evan grabbed a handful of potato chips and went on outside.

“Can you believe it’s been six months?” Tyler asked, giving his wife a kiss on the top of her head.

“Yeah, I kind of can,” Kelsey replied. “It’s been a very full six months.”

“That’s true, but it went by so fast.”

“Are you glad we said yes?”

Tyler looked pensive, truly considering the question. “Yeah,” he finally answered. “I really am.”

Six months earlier, Tyler and Kelsey were sitting across the table from Evan and Maggie, deep in discussion. “I feel like we’ve been sent to

the principal's office," Tyler joked. "Are we in trouble?"

"Of course not!" Maggie, a soft-spoken woman in her early fifties, smiled. "Don't you know you two are our favorites?"

"You tell everyone that," Kelsey protested. "I've heard you."

Maggie smiled. "It's true. You're all our favorites."

"We want to talk to you about stepping up," Evan said.

"What do you mean?" Tyler leaned back in his chair, looking a little nervous. He had a feeling whatever Evan was about to say was going to be entirely out of his comfort zone.

Tyler had often been characterized as shy or "backward," but the truth of the matter was that he was simply an introvert. He preferred to avoid crowds of people if he could. He could happily spend weeks in just the company of his wife and their two kids. Kelsey had dragged him to Evan and Maggie's group after Pastor Chris had preached about the importance of being in a group. That had been nearly a year ago. Although he had been reluctant at first, Tyler eventually got used to all the new people, and had been surprised to actually enjoy the evenings they all spent together.

However, after an amazingly great year in their group, Evan had recently told the group that he and Maggie were going to be transitioning from group leaders to group coaches and one of the other guys in the group would be taking over as leader of their group. That was three weeks ago.

Since then, two other couples in the group had decided to start their own new groups. Tyler hadn't been happy about it and had even been considering not going back. He felt like his family was breaking up. When Maggie had called Kelsey and invited them over for dinner, he was secretly a little worried they were in trouble for having negative attitudes, even though he knew he had only grumbled to his wife. Now, here they sat, and Evan wanted him to step up?

"What does that even mean?" he asked.

"It means leading your own group," Evan said simply. "I think you're both ready."

Tyler was shaking his head before Evan had even finished speaking. "I don't think so. I'm not the leader type."

Evan smiled, and the corners of his eyes crinkled into deep laugh lines.

“I disagree. I think you’re very much the leader type.”

“Really?” Kelsey sounded surprised.

Looking at Evan, as Tyler silently studied the situation, he couldn’t help but see why Kelsey was always saying Evan looked like Jesus. Not the real Jesus—the Southern Baptist Sunday School flannel-graph Jesus. With his longish brown hair, his full beard, and his pale blue eyes, he seemed to radiate a peace and calm that Tyler had been drawn to. Now, laughing at Kelsey’s reluctance, Evan’s eyes sparkled merrily as he said, “You don’t have to be a talker to be a leader.”

“Besides,” Maggie patted Kelsey’s hand, “that’s where you come in. You’re a team.”

“I still don’t understand why we have to break up the group in the first place,” Tyler protested. “If something ain’t broke, don’t fix it.”

“I know how you’re feeling,” Evan sounded more serious now. “I do. I really do. Our first group had the same vibe as this one does. That’s been years ago, but I still remember how hard it was to go our separate ways. But we’re Christ-followers, right? We’re his disciples?”

Tyler nodded begrudgingly.

“Disciples follow Jesus and lead others to do the same.” Evan shrugged his broad shoulders. “We have a great group. We’ve grown together for a year. We’ve seen amazing things happen in each other’s lives. We’ve added so many new members we can’t even fit in anyone’s living room anymore. We grow together, and then we expand. We make new groups so we can grow together with new people. It’s time.”

“I’m still not cut out to be a leader.” Tyler argued. “It’s not my thing.”

“Tyler, you’re only seeing who you have been and not who you are becoming.” Evan smiled and winked at Kelsey. “You’ve hosted group more times than anyone. You two are very hospitable.”

“That’s all Kelsey.”

“And you’ve led group several times and did a great job.”

“I didn’t really do anything special. You gave me the Leader’s Guide. I just followed it...” Tyler’s voice trailed off as he realized where Evan was leading him.

“And you always have a lot of good insights to share during discussions,” Maggie added. “You have a lot of wisdom to share.”

“I just grew up in church.” Tyler tried not to sound sulky.

“You’ve been blessed,” Evan agreed. “I know you’re a man of few words, but sometimes that can be just what people need in a leader. The Bible talks about ‘a word fitly spoken’ and that is where you really shine, Tyler. You don’t talk everyone’s ears off, but you have the right thing to say at the right time. That’s a gift.”

When Tyler didn’t respond, Evan said, “No one is going to twist your arm here. You’re a man of God, and I trust you to follow His leading. Just pray about it. Okay?”

Tyler nodded.

“Now,” Evan grinned. “Let’s eat!”

Four weeks later, Tyler white-knuckled the steering wheel as he and Kelsey drove to Faith Promise for a Connection Weekend.

Glancing over at the grim set of her husband’s jaw, Kelsey asked, “Are you nervous?”

“Kind of,” Tyler responded.

“Don’t be.” Kelsey reached over and held his big hand in hers. “You said God told you to do it, so that’s all there is to it.”

Tyler just nodded.

“What are you nervous about exactly?” quizzed Kelsey, drawing Tyler out.

He took a deep breath and then sighed heavily. “I don’t know. I just don’t want to mess it up. I’m still not sure I’m going to be any good at this...”

“Just remember why we’re doing this. Faith Promise’s motto or whatever. ‘Helping real people with real problems find real love.’” She squeezed his hand. “You don’t have to be super outgoing to do that. You just have to be yourself. Because, whether you want to admit it or not, you’re actually really good at that, Ty. That’s why all the guys from our old group call you about stuff. You’re a great listener, and you really care about people.”

“I guess so.” Tyler replied reluctantly.

Kelsey strained against the seatbelt to plant a kiss on her husband’s stubbled cheek. “Besides, like Maggie said, ‘we’re a team. And I’m good at talking.’”

## *Getting Started*

“People should be getting here soon,” Kelsey said as she looked through the living room blinds. “Do you think everyone will show up?”

“Evan said a lot of people sign up for a group on Connection Weekends, but don’t actually show up when the group meets.” Running his fingers through his short brown hair, Tyler added, “But, my luck, they’ll all show up and bring friends.”

“Oh, hush!” Kelsey swatted his arm. “It’ll be fine. Everyone who signed up seemed normal enough.”

“You’re the one who was worried about getting a bunch of ‘crazies.’” Tyler grinned.

“I can’t believe you told Evan I said that!” she wrinkled her nose, her eyebrows scrunching up in the middle. “He probably thought I was awful.”

In reality, Evan had just laughed. He never seemed phased by the stuff they said, joking or not. He had told them to trust that God would send the right people to their group—the people that Tyler and Kelsey needed and the ones who needed them.

Kelsey had asked Evan, “Does God know we don’t need any crazies?” To which Evan laughed until he had tears in his eyes. Tyler was actually very appreciative of Evan’s encouraging words. For an introvert to open up his home and life to a group of strangers, it helped to know that God was in charge.

“Ooh! Someone’s here!” Kelsey backed away from the window. “Don’t look like we’re watching out the window like a couple of dorks!”

“We are watching out the window like a couple of dorks!”

“Well, they don’t have to know that!”

Over the next ten minutes, their living room filled with strangers from church. Kelsey made sure everyone had drinks and cookies, and

Tyler rehearsed in his head what he planned to say. Evan had suggested the first group meeting be low-key—a time to get to know each other.

“Everyone likes talking about themselves,” Evan had said. “Just get them started, and you’ll likely not have time to say much at all. Introductions are a great way to break the ice.”

When everyone was finally settled into seats, looking expectantly at Tyler, he said, “I thought we could get started by each of us introducing ourselves and telling the group a little bit about ourselves.”

He grinned self-consciously and said, “I guess I get to go first. I’m Tyler. Kelsey and I have two kids, and we’ve been at Faith Promise for about six years. We have been in a really great group that has recently expanded to birth new groups, so, here we are... starting our own group.”

Tyler leaned forward, clasping his hands between his knees. “Um. I like to hunt and fish and go camping with the kids. I don’t really like talking about myself, so this is kind of awkward for me.” He grinned sheepishly, color inching up his neck. “I’m not the most outgoing guy in the world, but I’m going to give this my best shot. I look forward to getting to know you all and growing together.” He looked to his wife and said, “Your turn.”

Kelsey smiled widely, brushing her long, blonde hair away from her face. “I don’t have Tyler’s problem. I like talking just fine.” Everyone laughed, and she beamed. “Thanks for coming everyone. We’re really excited about this group, and I can’t wait to see what God’s going to do.”

“Like Tyler said, I’m Kelsey. We’ve been married for eight years. In my former life, I was a nurse, but now I stay home with the kids. I actually lead an Encounter group for women at the Pellissippi campus on Wednesday mornings, so this isn’t my first time leading a group. I hate hunting and fishing and only go camping to make Tyler happy.” Again, everyone laughed, and she grinned. “I like to work out and I like to shop.”

Tyler rolled his eyes and muttered, “She really likes to shop.”

Everyone laughed, and Tyler was relieved to feel the ice melting. Everyone was loosening up, and he could feel the tightness in his chest easing. *Maybe this won’t be so bad*, he thought.

The guy sitting next to Kelsey on the couch, a young black man who looked to be in his early twenties, said, “I guess I’m next. I’m Devonte, and I’ve been going to Faith Promise for like six or seven months now.

My aunt got me to come with her on her birthday—said that’s what she wanted for a gift—and I ended up getting saved that day.”

“That’s so cool,” Kelsey said, smiling over at him. “I bet your aunt was thrilled.”

Devonte smiled and nodded, “She’s been trying to get me to go to her group ever since, but it’s a bunch of older couples. I figured I’d try to make her happy and find a group where I fit in better.” He looked up at the ceiling and said, “Um, what else? I’m an IT guy at UT. Not married. No girlfriend. I like to play ball with my boys and I’m into gaming.”

“Yes!” The Latino guy across the room from him made a fist in the air. “A fellow gamer!”

“What about you?” Kelsey prompted the woman sitting next to Devonte. “Tell us about yourself.”

“I’m Sarah.” She tucked a loose strand of blonde hair that had escaped her ponytail behind her ear. “I’m married to Michael.” She bumped her shoulder up against her husband and smiled up at him. “We’ve been married for almost a year. We just moved here from Louisville, Kentucky. I don’t really know what I like to do. I’ve been in school for a long time, just graduated in May. I just got my license to teach in Tennessee, and I’m hoping to find a job soon. I’m looking forward to not being a student anymore!”

“I know that feeling,” a young woman with long, red hair commiserated. “I recently went back to school. It takes over your whole life.”

Sarah’s husband nodded in response. “We actually both just graduated. I just finished grad school. I’m Michael, by the way. I’m a civil engineer. We moved to Knoxville because I got a job at a firm downtown. We really love it at Faith Promise and are really excited to get more involved. We both just started serving. Sarah’s serving in fpKids, and I’m doing security. This is our first time in a group.”

Looking to the Latino gamer, Michael said, “Tag. You’re it.”

“I’m Alex,” he said. “I’m a social worker. I work with kids who are in foster care and with their parents who are working to get their kids back. I’ve been at Faith Promise since I was a kid. Like I said, I’m a gamer. My job is so stressful, I like to zone out and unwind when I get home.” Patting the knee of the lady next to him, he said, “This is my wife, Emily.”

“Hi,” she waved at the group. “I’m Emily. I work as a reception-

ist.” She looked over at Tyler and said, “I’m not much of a talker either. Alex talks enough for both of us.”

Alex shrugged and grinned, “It’s true. Not gonna lie.”

“I’m glad to be here, though.” Emily continued. “I’ve been at Faith Promise since college when I met Alex. I’ve been in a couple different groups, but not for a while. Looking forward to getting to know you all.”

“You’re up,” Tyler nodded toward the next guy, a man who looked to be in his early forties.

“I’m Dave,” the man said. His arms were crossed over his chest, his legs stretched out in front of him. “Am I the only one who feels like we’re at an AA meeting? ‘Hi, I’m Dave. I’m thirty days sober.’” There were a few awkward chuckles around the room, but Dave didn’t seem to notice how his joke fell flat.

“Anyway, I’m Dave. I work in sales, but I’m hoping to change things up soon. Recently divorced... thank God! I’ve got three kids, but they’re all in Bristol with their mom. She moved back home to her folks.” Looking over at Tyler, he said, “Don’t worry about not being a talker, man. I can help you out. I’m not bragging or anything, but I know a lot about the Bible and can help you out.”

Tyler didn’t say anything but dipped his head in a small nod of acknowledgement. He wasn’t sure how to take Dave’s introduction, but it left him feeling a bit uncomfortable.

“I’m Marcus, and this is my beautiful wife, Chantel,” the next guy said. He was an incredibly tall black man with close-cropped hair. His long arm was draped over the shoulders of a woman who looked incredibly small next to her giant of a husband. She fingered one of her long braids and looked a little uncomfortable. “We’ve got two boys, both in high school. We’ve been at Faith Promise for, what is it, baby? Three years?” His wife nodded, and he continued, “Three years. We’ve never been in a group before, but Pastor Kyle talked us into it at Connection Weekend. This might sound weird, but I’m really into gardening. I like to grow my own food, and I’m hoping Chantel will let me get some chickens soon.”

“Not gonna happen.” She shook her head.

Marcus winked. “I’ll talk her into it.”

Everyone laughed, and Kelsey asked, “What about you, Chantel?”

What do you do?”

“I’m a graphic designer. I work from home,” she answered. “And I go to the boys’ ball games. I don’t have time for much more than that.”

“And last but not least . . .” Kelsey smiled at the redhead who had spoken earlier. “We know you’re a student, but what else?”

“I’m Jenna,” she smiled, shifting nervously in her seat. “I’m a Pediatric Nurse at Children’s, and I’m going back to school to get my B.A. in Nursing. I’ve had a hard time finding a group that feels right since my fiancé and I broke up a while back. We were in a group together. I didn’t feel comfortable staying. So, here I am.” She then added, “I’m glad I’m not the only single person in the group.”

“It’s great to meet everyone and get to know each other a little bit,” Tyler said. “Thanks for sharing. As you may or may not know, this is an Encounter Group, which is just one of four types of groups at Faith Promise. As an Encounter Group, we’ll be studying the Bible together and learning how to apply it to our lives. We’re going to start out using the Weekend Discussion Guides which the church provides and dig deeper into the weekend sermons. We may eventually do some topical studies with videos.”

Dave interrupted him to say, “I have a lot of experience teaching adult Sunday School classes at my old church. I’ll be happy to teach some lessons for the group sometime.”

Once again, Tyler found himself not knowing how to take Dave, so he just said, “Thanks for the offer. I appreciate it.”

“No, problem, man,” Dave smiled. “I just want to help.”

Tyler smiled at him and then said, “We also want to make sure we are spending time together in ways besides our Encounter group. We will have some ‘Embrace days’ where we just get together and do something fun, and some ‘Engage Days’ where we get out into the community and serve together.”

“Don’t forget ‘Expand.’” Kelsey reminded him.

“Right.” Tyler nodded. “I know we’re just getting started as a group, but I want us to remember that one of the marks of a successful group is that eventually they develop new group leaders. I’m not asking anyone to volunteer right now or anything. Just be sensitive to what God might lead you to do. I know I never expected to be a group leader, yet here I am.”

“So far, so good!” Michael encouraged him.

“Thanks.” Tyler laughed. “I have to admit—so far it’s been pretty easy.”

After the last person had left for home, Kelsey shut the front door and turned to Tyler. “Well, what do you think?”

“It went well.”

“I think so, too.” She gave him a hug. “You were great.”

“It really wasn’t bad. I was nervous for nothing.”

She nodded. “I think it will be a good group.”

“Me, too,” he agreed. “If I can just remember everyone’s name.”

“Name tags!” Kelsey exclaimed. “Next time, we’ll have name tags. I never even thought about it until I was sitting there trying to remember someone’s name.”

“Novice mistake,” Tyler grinned.

## *Embracing Each Other*

Kelsey spread a tablecloth over the concrete picnic table, and Chantel helped her tape it down. “You think these overgrown boys are excited?”

Following Kelsey’s gaze to the basketball court, Chantel laughed, “They do seem to be pretty into it.”

The group had gotten together at a park for an ‘Embrace Day,’ and all the men had abandoned the ladies to lay claim to the basketball court as soon as they arrived.

“Tyler’s never been the sports type, but he seems to be having fun.”

“Unfortunately for Marcus,” Chantel grinned, “being six-foot-five didn’t automatically make him good at basketball. He’s pretty clumsy.”

“Where did your boys get it from?” Kelsey asked, watching her friends’ teenage son dunk the basketball over Alex’s outstretched arms.

“Their mama.” Chantel laughed. “I played in college.”

“Nice!” Seeing a car pull into the parking lot, Kelsey said, “There’s Jenna. That’s everyone. Why don’t you go tell everybody we’re ready to eat?”

Chantel left to gather the group together as Jenna made her way up to the picnic table. “Hey, girl,” she said, sitting down with a sigh.

“Hey!” Kelsey greeted her. “You got here just in time. We’re getting ready to eat.”

“Sorry I’m late.” Jenna pushed her sunglasses to the top of her head and Kelsey saw her eyes were red and swollen from crying. “It’s been a rough day.”

“What happened?”

“We lost a kid today,” Jenna replied. “Leukemia. He was a favorite patient. I’ve taken care of him for years.”

“I’m so sorry!” Kelsey gave her friend a hug. “Is there anything I can do for you?”

“Not unless you have a bottle of wine hidden somewhere,” Jenna joked half-heartedly.

Something in her tone got Kelsey’s attention, but, before she could ask any further questions, the group came straggling in, laughing and talking.

“Let’s ask a blessing on the food,” Tyler said. “Before we all pass out from starvation.”

Dave patted his ample mid-section and said, “That’s why I keep some reserves.” Everyone laughed and he seemed pleased with himself.

“Why don’t you pray, Dave?” Tyler asked.

After Dave blessed the food, everyone began loading plates with grilled hot dogs and potato salad, laughing and talking all the while. They had only been a group for five weeks, but they had already developed an easy comradery. They were getting to know each other better with each group meeting and counted each other as friends. Tyler’s nerves were completely gone when it came to leading group and facilitating discussions.

As they were scattered around a couple picnic tables, sitting in camp chairs and balancing plates on their knees, they heard someone call, “Devonte! Is that you?”

Looking up from his hot dog, Devonte’s face broke into a wide grin when he saw a group of five guys in basketball shorts walking toward him. He stood up and clasped the hand of the guy in front, “What are you doing here?”

“They broke the rim off the goal where we usually play, so we thought we’d come here,” the man responded. “What you up to, man?”

“This is my group from church,” Devonte answered, stepping away from the group to talk with his friend. “We’re just hanging out today.”

“Yeah, I heard you’ve been going to church with your aunt.” The man looked suspiciously at the group. “That why we’ve not seen you around much?”

“Nah,” Devonte shook his head, “I’ve been working all the time. Overtime.”

The man nodded. “That’s cool.” Still looking at the group, he said, “What does your church group do?”

“You know, man, we do Bible studies and stuff. Pray together.”

Devonte shrugged. “Today we’re playing ball and eating hot dogs. You hungry?”

His friend smiled “Nah, I’m good, bruh. But I got you on the court.”

As the group of guys jogged down the hill to the basketball court, Devonte explained to his friends, “I grew up with those guys. We played ball together in high school.”

They finished eating and, after helping clean up, the guys headed back down the hill to play basketball. Kelsey kept one eye on the kids who were climbing all over the playground equipment as she sat down next to Jenna. “How are you doing?”

“I’m okay,” Jenna replied. Her eyes had lost their tear-stained puffiness and she just looked tired. “I’ve lost kids before, but it never gets any easier. I try not to get attached, but it never works.”

“I don’t think I could ever do what you do,” Kelsey confessed. “You have to be incredibly strong to take care of seriously sick kids.”

Jenna’s eyes filled with tears as she shook her head, “I’m not strong. I feel like I’m falling apart.” She wiped her eyes with a balled-up napkin she held in her hand, “I didn’t want to come tonight. After such a hard day, I didn’t want to see anyone.” She glanced over at Kelsey and quickly said, “No offense.”

“None taken.” Kelsey squeezed the other woman’s hand. “So, why’d you come? We would’ve understood.”

“Because I was afraid to go home.” Jenna’s voice trembled and tears threatened to fall again.

“What do you mean?”

Jenna heaved a shuddery sigh. She glanced around to make sure she wouldn’t be overheard before she said, “All I wanted to do was go home and drink until I passed out.”

Kelsey’s mind spun as she tried to think of the right words to say. Her heart hurt for Jenna, and she didn’t want to add to her pain by saying the wrong thing. She suddenly remembered Pastor Chris’ sermon from the week before, how he had revealed parts of his own story before reminding the church that they weren’t there to just sit around enjoying each other’s company.

He had said, “We exist to help real people with real problems find real love.” Kelsey breathed a prayer for wisdom before saying, “I know

you're going through a really hard time right now. I know we weren't around for when you and your fiancé broke up, but we're here for you now. We want to walk through this tough time with you."

Tears dripped from Jenna's lowered eyes. "I don't know when it became a problem. I just didn't know what to do with myself after Jesse left. I was so lonely. And so depressed. I thought I had gotten a grip on things, but then I failed a test last week, got in a fight with my sister over something stupid, and now... losing Bryson today... he was only seven years old." She took a deep, shuddery breath, and then looked up at Kelsey, "I'm not sure how to do this on my own. I never thought I would have to."

"Well," Kelsey squeezed her hand again, "you're not on your own. You have us." She paused for a moment, thinking, before saying, "I don't have a lot of experience with this particular issue, but do you know about Celebrate? I've heard a lot of really great things about the Celebrate groups."

Jenna nodded. "I've thought about going, but I've not been able to make myself do it for some reason."

"I'd be happy to go with you the first time," Kelsey offered.

"Really?" Jenna looked hopeful.

"Of course."

"Thank you. I'd like that."

The two sat together in silence, watching the kids play, until Tyler jogged up the hill and asked for a bottle of water. "Are you winning?" Kelsey asked.

"Of course not." Tyler chugged the water. "Devonte's friends kicked our butts all over the place. We had to mix it up for the second game. We couldn't score any points against them."

Kelsey laughed, and then said, "Are we going to pack it in soon? We said we'd go until eight and it's already eight-fifteen. The kids need to get to bed."

Tyler nodded, before saying, "If you don't mind, can you get the girls together and come down here. I'd kind of like to pray all together before we leave."

Surprised at her husband's initiative, Kelsey quickly agreed. When they made it down to the court, the guys were just finishing up their

second game, dripping with sweat.

Kelsey noticed Tyler speaking quietly with Devonte before saying, “This has been a lot of fun. We are definitely going to have to do it again.” Everyone nodded agreeably and Tyler continued, addressing Devonte’s friends, “It was really nice getting to know you guys.”

Alex interrupted and said, “But you could have taken it a little easier on us.”

Devonte’s friends just grinned, shaking their heads.

Tyler went on, “If you don’t mind, we want to say a quick prayer before everyone goes their separate ways. Devonte?”

Devonte looked nervous, standing with his feet wide apart, and his hands clasped in front of him. He bowed his head and began to thank God for a good time and ask for safety on the way home. Kelsey peeked from beneath her eyelashes and watched his friends exchange surprised looks with each other before awkwardly bowing their heads.

When Devonte finished praying, he grinned and as Tyler smacked him on the shoulder. He went over and talked with his buddies while the rest of the group prepared to leave the park.

“Good job,” Kelsey whispered to Tyler.

He just smiled.

## *Asking for Advice*

The conversation around the table had risen to a dull roar when Tyler stood up and walked into the kitchen. He threw his paper plate in the trash and looked over Kelsey's shoulder as she and Sarah sorted index cards into a pile. "Do we have a winner?"

The group had been meeting together for four months, and they had decided to mix things up by doing a short-term video-driven study. The group members had all provided suggested topics they would like to study and Tyler had looked for video studies pertaining to those topics on Right Now Media. He had emailed the group a list of options, and they had all voted tonight, writing their choice of study on index cards which Kelsey and Sarah were arranging into piles on the kitchen island.

"It looks like the Relationships study wins by one vote. The study on Prayer is in second place, and then we have one single vote for the Tim Tebow study," Kelsey said.

"That one was mine," Jenna said, coming into the kitchen from the dining room. "I couldn't help it. He's so pretty."

"Maybe next time," Tyler grinned.

Jenna shrugged, smiling. "A girl can try."

As the group reconvened in the living room after finishing their meal, Tyler announced, "We have a winner." Holding up the index cards, he said, "We had one more vote for the Relationships study than the Prayer study. Maybe we can do the Prayer one another time."

Several heads nodded, and Marcus said, "They both sounded good, but we could really use the Relationship study right now."

Tyler looked over to the other man and saw pain in his eyes. His wife, Chantel, was staring at the floor. Making a mental note to talk to Marcus after group, Tyler said, "We'll start the new study next week. I think it will be good for all of us. We can all use an opportunity to examine the

health of our relationships.”

“I was really hoping to do the Prayer study,” Dave grumbled, his thick arms crossed over his chest. “No offense, but I’m kind of sick of relationships right now.”

Tyler considered what to say before responding. Dave had become notorious for having a toxic take on relationships. His marriage had ended badly and he often complained about what was going on between himself and his ex-wife.

Choosing his words carefully, Tyler said, “This particular study isn’t just about marriage or romantic relationships. It covers having godly relationships with friends, your children, co-workers, and, of course, spouses and romantic partners as well. I chose this one because it seemed to be really well-rounded. I think it will be good!”

“If you say so,” Dave shrugged, a sour expression on his face. “It only lasts six weeks, right? I can tough it out, I guess.”

Attempting to ignore the other man’s negativity, Tyler said, “Yep. Just six weeks. It will be something different, and I believe it will be helpful.”

After settling the matter of the upcoming study, the men went back to the dining room and the ladies stayed in the living room as everyone broke up into groups of twos and threes to share prayer requests and pray with one another.

Once everyone had left that evening, Tyler helped Kelsey clean up the kitchen before they put the kids to bed. As he was sacking up the trash to take it to the curb, he asked, “What did you think about the Dave thing?”

“He is so bitter,” Kelsey stopped wiping the countertop to look at her husband, “and it just seems to be getting worse with time—not better.”

“I know,” he agreed. “He seems so resistant to everything we do. I don’t know if he’ll ever be happy in this group.”

“I was really surprised at how much he resisted the Relationships study. I would almost suggest we do the Prayer one instead—since you and I both voted for Relationships, which is why it won—but did you notice how serious Marcus was when he said he and Chantel could use it?”

Tyler nodded. “I did. I made sure to pair up with Marcus to pray. He told me they were having marriage problems, but he didn’t go into

detail. I think he was worried about the other guys overhearing.”

“We were on the same page,” Kelsey smiled. “I made sure to get with Chantel for prayer time. She was a little more forthcoming. She was really upset.”

“What’s going on with them?”

“She said Marcus used to have a real problem with porn. It caused a lot of problems in their relationship in the past, but he had gotten away from it. Chantel said he had ‘gotten into it again’ since he’s been traveling so much for work lately. She seemed really hurt.”

“Oh, man.” Tyler’s brow was furrowed with concern. “I’m not sure how to support them through this.” Looking to his wife, he asked, “What do you think we should do?”

“I think you should call Evan while I put the kids to bed,” Kelsey suggested, “because I don’t have a clue how to handle this one.”

Taking her advice, Tyler went out on the front porch and sat on the porch swing. He pulled his phone out of his pocket and called his Groups Coach. Evan wouldn’t be surprised to get his call; Tyler had called for advice several times right after something came up in group.

“Hey, Tyler. What’s up?” Evan answered on the second ring.

Tyler quickly explained the situation and asked for advice.

“Hmm,” Evan paused as he considered the story the younger man had told him. “Well, the thing with Dave isn’t new, but it does seem to be getting worse. This isn’t the first time he’s had a really negative reaction to something the group is in agreement about. Maybe it’s time to have a talk with him. You could do that, or you could hand it off to me and I can talk to him.”

“Does it make me weak to let you handle it?” Tyler asked. “Because the thought of it makes me want to puke.”

“No. Not at all,” Evan reassured him. “That’s what I’m here for. Helping you deal with someone who is being disruptive to your group is part of my ‘job description.’” He chuckled. “That’s why they pay me the big bucks.”

Tyler laughed, “Right.” Changing the subject to focus on Marcus and Chantel’s issue, Tyler asked, “What do I say to Marcus?”

“Well, while that may be a much more serious problem than a toxic attitude, it may actually be simpler for you to deal with as a leader.”

Evan paused to consider the advice he was giving before continuing, “First, I think you need to be supportive of Marcus, without any judgment. Let him know you are praying for him. Secondly, you can recommend a group that can provide accountability for him. Faith Promise has a Celebrate group named ‘Called Out.’ It’s a share group for men that deals with issues of integrity. I think it could be really helpful for him. Third, I think this would be a good opportunity for you and Kelsey to recommend counseling for Marcus and Chantel. Faith Promise actually employs two full-time counselors and their services are free for all Faith Promise attendees.”

“Really?” Tyler was surprised. “I don’t think I knew that.”

“Yep. With an issue like this that is so damaging to a marriage and is especially hurtful for a wife to know about, counseling can be a really important part of the healing process.”

“Okay.” Tyler sighed as he moved the porch swing back and forth with his feet. “Thanks for this, Evan. I feel like I at least know what I should do now. Can I get back to you about Dave? I’m not sure whether I should talk to him myself or hand that one over to you.”

“Of course,” Evan answered. “While I’ve got you on the phone, I want to check in with you about how you are doing. How’s your quiet time? How are you encountering God right now?”

“Honestly?” Tyler sounded thoughtful. “It’s better than it’s ever been. I’ve been getting up forty-five minutes early for work, when Kelsey and the kids are still asleep, and using the Bible reading plan that’s in the back of the book the church gave us in January. Also, Kelsey got me a devotional book for dads that I’ve been reading as well.”

“That’s good to hear,” Evan responded. “Have you found a way to embrace others on your own?”

“Yeah,” Tyler nodded, even though he knew Evan couldn’t see him. “My neighbor, Jason, has been working on a building project—building a shed in his backyard. He asked me to help him hold something one day while he screwed a heavy piece into place, and I ended up spending the rest of the evening helping him. Since then, I’ve been helping him work on it once or twice a week. I didn’t know him very well before he asked for my help, but he’s turned out to be a really good guy. He’s not a believer, though, and he’s not been very open to coming to church or to group.

So, I've just been helping him with his shed and I've been able to share my own testimony with him. We're planning a hunting trip in the Fall."

"That's really great," Evan encouraged him. "I'm glad you took advantage of the opportunity that presented itself. Sometimes the best Embrace opportunities fall into our laps like that, and it sounds like it's been an opportunity for you to Engage, too. I'm sure he's appreciated your help with his building project as well as your company."

"It's been good for both of us," Tyler agreed. "It's nice for me to get out of the house and do something I enjoy. I tend to be so focused on my family that I forget other people exist sometimes."

Evan chuckled, and then said, "This is where I would normally ask about the last one, but I already know how you're expanding the Kingdom. You and Devonte are still meeting outside of group?"

"Yeah," Tyler answered. "We try to have lunch together once a week. It's been fun for both of us. He has so many questions about the Bible. He didn't grow up in church at all. Until he came to FP with his aunt a few months ago, he told me he'd only been in church three or four times in his life."

"Oh, wow." Evan sounded surprised.

"Everything's new to him. He's so pumped about everything he's learning." Tyler chuckled. "It's kind of contagious. When I see things through his eyes, I find myself getting excited again about things that had sort of grown stale to me."

"I love when that happens." Evan paused and then said, "Well, Tyler. It sounds like you've got everything under control. You just let me know what you need from me. If you want me to talk to Dave, I can. If not, I trust you to handle it on your own. Either way."

"Thanks."

"No problem," Evan replied. "I'm here if you need me. All you have to do is call."

## *Serving Together*

“Dude, I’m pumped!” Alex was bouncing up and down on the balls of his feet as he stood next to Tyler outside of a modest, ranch-style home on a sleepy street in North Knoxville.

The two men and their wives were waiting for the rest of their group to arrive for the third official group ‘Engage Day.’ Tyler had enjoyed each of their previous Engage days when the whole group had the opportunity to serve together.

The first time, they had volunteered at a Knox Area Rescue Mission thrift store where they organized displays, put out merchandise, and sorted donations. They had felt good knowing they had served a non-profit that fed and sheltered so many homeless people at the downtown mission.

The second time they had served together had been especially fun. They had joined some fpKids volunteers and taken popsicles and information about the children’s ministry to Little League baseball fields and given them to kids. Even as an introvert, Tyler had enjoyed the day and had personally invited several families to check out Faith Promise as well as fpKids. He had laughed the following Sunday when a little boy with skinned knees and a buzz cut whom he had played catch with at the ball field ran up to him after church saying, “Hi, Mr. Tyler! Got any popsicles?”

Now, the group was heading up a project that Alex had suggested. As a social worker, he often came across opportunities to serve in the community, and this particular opportunity had grabbed everyone’s hearts. Alex was trying to place Holden, a nine-year-old boy with cerebral palsy, with an experienced family who was willing to foster him. The only problem was that the boy used a wheelchair, and the foster family’s home wasn’t wheelchair accessible. While their doorways were wide enough to accommodate Holden’s wheelchair, the home had both front

and back porches with several steps leading up to them, but they didn't have a wheelchair ramp. Everyone thought it was a perfect opportunity to make a positive impact in their community.

"I'm pretty pumped." Tyler grinned at Alex. "I'm better at swinging a hammer than sorting donated dresses."

"KARM was fun," Kelsey shook her head at him, "and you did just fine sorting dresses."

"Even still," Tyler shrugged. "This is actually fun."

"How great is it that we have an engineer in the group?" Emily asked. "When we met Michael here to take measurements last week, he said it would be pretty easy to build the ramp."

"Marcus is bringing everything in his pickup, right?" Alex asked.

Tyler nodded, "We went to Lowes last night and got the lumber and everything on Michael's list. With the money we all pitched in, we were able to cover about seventy-five percent of the cost for the foster family."

"Nice!" Alex's grin spread across his face. "You're really going to love this family. The Clarks are great. They have two kids of their own and one foster daughter already. I'm so glad they're able to take Holden. He's such a great kid."

One by one, the other members of the group showed up, lining the street with their vehicles and wearing their Faith Promise shirts. Over the next six hours, the group worked together to serve the foster family. All of the men worked on building the ramp under Michael's direction, while the women and kids methodically worked through a list of small projects that Mrs. Clark had provided at Emily's request.

The Clarks arrived home as the group was finishing up, just as they planned. When they saw the completed wheelchair ramp, Mrs. Clark broke into tears and Mr. Clark beamed. Their two little guys ran up and down the ramp, while their foster daughter clung to Mrs. Clark's legs, a bit frightened of all the strangers.

"You just don't know what this means to us," Mrs. Clark said through her tears. "We couldn't afford what the contractor quoted us, and we didn't know how to build it ourselves. I was just heartbroken over the thought of having to turn Holden away over four measly steps!"

Mr. Clark cleared his throat and said, "We're really very grateful. It means a lot to us."

“We’re happy to help,” Tyler said.

As the group loaded their stuff into their vehicles and left, Alex came up to Tyler and said, “Man, this was my favorite day of group yet! I’m so glad everyone was willing to do this. If you really knew just how much of a difference this is going to make for Holden—and if you could just meet this kid—you would understand how excited I am.”

Tyler clapped him on the shoulder. “I’m excited, too. You and Emily did such a great job arranging for all this to happen.”

“Emily did all the organizing. Actually, it was her idea to do this for our Engage Day. I hadn’t thought of it,” Alex admitted.

“It wasn’t hard.” Emily shrugged. “Organization is my spiritual gift.”

Tyler chuckled and then said, “Maybe we should put you guys in charge of organizing all of our future serving opportunities. You’re good at it,” he said looking at Emily, “and you’re really passionate about it.” He addressed the last statement to Alex. “You make a great team.”

“Okay,” Alex immediately agreed. “We can do that, can’t we, babe?”

Emily nodded in agreement. “Sure.”

“Great!” Tyler grinned broadly.

Kelsey slipped her arm around Tyler’s waist and joked, “You’re getting so good at this delegation thing. And you thought you wouldn’t make a good group leader!”

## *Equipping New Leaders*

“Are you ready?” Tyler asked Michael.

Michael nodded. “I am. I’ve been looking forward to leading group tonight. I’ve thought several times about leading a group of my own, but I never wanted to commit to something I’m not sure I would enjoy doing. So, when you asked me to lead tonight, I thought it was a pretty good opportunity for a trial run.”

“I’m glad you’re thinking about leading a group in the future,” Tyler said. “I’ve noticed how good you are at adding insight to our group discussions, and you’ve always struck me as being a natural leader. That’s why I asked you to lead tonight. Evan asked me whether someone in the group would be a good candidate to apprentice as group leaders with the goal of starting a new group, and I immediately thought of you and Sarah.”

Michael nodded thoughtfully, and said, “Well, I’m happy to consider it. Like I said, I already have been. I guess we’ll see how tonight goes.”

“It will go great,” Tyler reassured him.

When the group had finished their meal and went to the living room to start their study time, Michael began group by saying, “Now that we’ve finished the Relationships study, we’re going to dive into the sermon series that Pastor Chris just started and take a deeper look at Sunday’s message.”

“Thank God!” Dave grinned, ignoring the looks of irritation on several group members’ faces. “I’m ready to be done with relationships.”

Michael looked uncomfortable, and Tyler cleared his throat, ready to say something. He had already talked to Dave about his negativity in group. He had considered letting Evan handle it, but ultimately decided to give it a shot himself first. The conversation, though awkward, was relatively well-received and Dave had behaved better for the next several

weeks. He missed about half of the group meetings during the Relationships study, but, when he did attend, he crossed his arms and just stayed quiet during the study time.

Before Tyler could say anything, Dave held up both hands and said, “Sorry. Sorry! I’ll be a good boy.”

Michael glanced at Tyler and, when he nodded slightly, pressed on and introduced an icebreaker question. As Michael facilitated the discussion according to the Leader’s Guide the Groups ministry had provided, everyone involved themselves in the discussion. Several times, Dave cut someone off mid-sentence, talking over them, but Michael always redirected the conversation back to the person who had been interrupted and let them finish what they were saying.

When Michael elaborated on one of the points he read from the Weekend Discussion Guide, Dave immediately interjected his opinion that Michael had interpreted something wrong. He was launching into a loud rebuttal in a disrespectful tone when Tyler stepped in and calmly said, “I think Michael’s got this one, Dave.”

Surprised at being stopped, Dave protested, “He doesn’t know what he’s talking about.”

Color rose into Michael’s cheeks, but before he could say anything, Tyler said, “I think he’s doing fine.” Nodding toward Michael, he said, “Go on. We’re with you.”

The rest of the group meeting went without further complication, although Dave sulked in his chair, obviously angry. Before he left for the night, he told Tyler, “I don’t know why you shut me down. I know what I’m talking about. I’ve studied a lot.”

Proceeding carefully, Tyler said, “In this case, it was mostly a matter of respect. I felt like it wasn’t going in a productive direction. It felt a little hostile. I thought it was better to let Michael continue leading the discussion.”

“I wasn’t trying to be hostile,” Dave said, “but it’s hard not to say something when someone is getting it all wrong.”

“I don’t really think he got anything wrong, though,” Tyler responded. “I think it was a matter of opinion. Either way, it’s important that we show respect to each other in our discussion time.”

“Whatever,” Dave muttered. When some of the other group members

came near them on their way out the door, Dave walked off and slipped out the door without saying goodbye.

Catching sight of Michael and Sarah preparing to leave, Tyler stepped up to Michael and said, “You did a great job tonight.”

“Thanks,” Michael said. “It felt like it mostly went well.”

“Your part was great,” Tyler agreed. “I know there was a little... tension... but you handled it just fine.”

“You think so?”

Tyler nodded. “Yeah.” He grinned and then said, “So, Kelsey and I are going to be out of town in three weeks. Think you can lead group again?”

“Sure.”

“Good man!” Tyler said.

When the last people left for home, Tyler leaned against the kitchen counter and pulled out his cell phone. He tapped the icon for his text messages and selected Evan’s name from the list. He quickly tapped out a message. I don’t think talking to Dave myself worked. I think it’s time to let you handle the situation.

A moment later, he received a reply. No problem, Tyler. I can do that. I’ll call you about it tomorrow evening? BTW, how did Michael do tonight.

Tyler responded, He did a great job. Handled Dave’s interruptions well. He said he’s already been thinking about leading a group. I think he’ll be good at it.

Evan sent back a short response. Excellent! Good job. Talk to you tomorrow.

Coming up to her husband and peering at the screen of his phone, Kelsey asked, “Letting Evan take care of Dave?”

“Yep.”

“Good,” Kelsey responded. “I’m getting kind of fed up.”

“You know,” Tyler pulled her into a hug, “this hasn’t been nearly as hard as I imagined it would be. Even when things get complicated, like having to deal with Dave, I know if it gets to be too much I can just pass the ball to Evan. I didn’t realize how important the Coaches are until after we started leading. To be honest, I didn’t really know what their purpose was.”

“I know what you mean,” she agreed. “It’s good to know someone’s got our back.”

## *Exceeding Expectations*

“Can you believe it’s been six months?” Tyler asked, giving his wife a kiss on the top of her head.

“Yeah. I kind of can,” Kelsey replied. “It’s been a very full six months.”

“That’s true, but it went by so fast.”

“Are you glad we said yes?”

Tyler looked pensive, truly considering the question. “Yeah,” he finally answered. “I really am.”

“Me, too,” she agreed.

Jenna came into the kitchen, interrupting their reminiscing, and said, “There you two are. Alex says the burgers are done. We’re ready to eat.”

“Excellent,” Tyler grinned, “I’m starving.”

“Hey,” Jenna looked suddenly shy, “I wanted to thank both of you for your support over the last few months. Monday marked ninety days sober for me.”

“That’s wonderful!” Kelsey hugged her friend. “We’re so proud of you!”

“I really don’t think I could have done it without you,” Jenna said. “I don’t know why I was so scared to go to Celebrate. I guess maybe I thought it would be weird or intimidating, but having you go with me those first couple of times made all the difference. Once I got to know some people and realized it wasn’t scary—not a thing like what I had built up in my mind—I was fine. I just needed you to push me a little.” Jenna hugged the other woman again. “Thank you.”

“You’re very, very welcome.” Kelsey quickly wiped tears from her eyes before adding, “Besides—that’s what friends are for.”

The three friends went outside and joined the rest of the group on the big back deck. Tyler scanned the faces of his friends, all caught up in conversation and laughter with each other. It amazed him how, in only

six short months, a group of strangers could become so close and feel so much like a family.

“Here ya go, Boss,” Alex handed a platter of burgers to Tyler. After depositing the burgers on the long picnic table, Tyler returned to the grill and said to his friend, “Thanks for grilling. We’re going to miss you as resident grill master.”

“There’s nothing saying we can’t drop by the old group every now and then, right?” Alex grinned, “And offer my superior grilling services.”

“That’s true,” Tyler agreed. “You know, we’re really proud of you and Emily for stepping up to start a new group. It’s bittersweet to see you leave our group, but we know God has great things in store for you.”

“Thanks.” Alex spoke seriously as he used tongs to remove hot dogs from the grill, “Ever since that day we built the wheelchair ramp for Holden, I kept thinking about starting an Engage Group to do that sort of thing all the time. Emily likes planning projects almost as much as I like heading up the work part, so it kind of seemed like a no-brainer the more we thought about it.”

“Well, I know you two are going to make an awesome team.” Tyler picked up the platter of hot dogs and asked, “Will you guys have a table for the next Connection Weekend?”

“Yeah,” Alex nodded. “Hopefully, we’ll have at least a few people sign up. I’ve talked to a couple people about it, so I’m feeling pretty positive about it. And Emily already has three projects lined up. All we need is willing volunteers and we’ll be ready to go.”

As the two men joined the rest of the group, Michael scooted over to let Tyler sit down at the picnic table between him and Kelsey. After blessing the food, Tyler looked over at Michael and asked, “I heard you had a good talk with Evan the other day?”

“Yeah, I did.” Michael nodded, talking around a bite of his burger. “I told him I don’t think I’m ready just yet to start a new Expand Group, but, after Sarah and I talked about it some more, we decided to set a goal for launching a new group for six months from now. Until then, we’re going to stay with you and Kelsey and I guess I’ll be your apprentice.”

Tyler nodded. He and Evan had already discussed this, so it wasn’t news to him, but it was the first chance he had been able to talk about it with Michael, “That sounds like a good plan to me. With all those

dates I have to go out of town for work that I told you about, it will be very helpful to be able to have you lead group and help take some of the burden off of Kelsey.”

“Sarah and I were talking about sharing some of the hosting duties, too,” Michael said. “So that we can get a feel for hosting in our home as well as leading a group, if that’s okay.”

Tyler chuckled. “Kelsey will be thrilled to not have to clean the house every single week.” He chewed thoughtfully for a moment before asking, “What drew you to the idea of starting an Expand Group as opposed to the other types of groups.”

“I’m not sure, really,” Michael answered. “I guess I really love the whole idea of making disciples who make disciples. It just seems like a great opportunity to make a really big impact. With my background in business, I’m really comfortable in that sort of role.”

Tyler noticed Marcus trying to catch his eye and dipped his head in a quick nod. Marcus grinned and then addressed the group, “So, Chantel and I won’t be at group for the next couple of weeks.”

“How come?” Jenna inquired. “Is something wrong?”

“Not at all,” Marcus shook his head as his grin spread wider across his face. “I finally talked Chantel into that cruise we were talking about.”

“That’s great!” Sarah responded.

“I didn’t offer to conquer my fear of boats for nothing, though,” Chantel said teasingly.

“That sounds ominous,” Kelsey’s eyes widened, looking from Chantel to Marcus.

“It is ominous,” Marcus said gravely. “She’s making me take her to spend a week with her mother before we get on the ship.”

“Oh, man,” Devonte teased, “not the mother-in-law!”

Marcus nodded his head dramatically. “She won’t let me drop her off, either. She’s making me spend a whole week with her mother, her two crazy aunties, and her sister!”

Chantel looked amused but didn’t say a thing.

Tyler was glad to hear the easy teasing and the news about the upcoming vacation. Marcus and Chantel had gone through a really rough patch in their marriage a few months before. After sharing their marriage issues when the group was discussing the Relationship study,

Tyler had taken Evan's advice and recommended the men's share group for Marcus and marriage counseling for both of them. Marcus had been willing from the very beginning, but Chantel had taken a little convincing.

For the last few months, though, Tyler and Kelsey had seen a gradual but visible improvement in the way the couple related to each other at group. It was just last week that Chantel had told Kelsey that their marriage was feeling stronger than it had in a really long time. Tyler found it very gratifying to know that connecting the couple to resources at Faith Promise had made such a huge difference in their lives and their marriage.

That night, after all the group members had left, Evan and Maggie remained in the kitchen sipping coffee and talking with Tyler and Kelsey. "We had a great time," Maggie said. "It's always so much fun for us to drop in on one of the groups we coach and see how everyone interacts with each other. Not all groups feel as cohesive as this one. You guys have done such a great job bringing everyone together."

"Thanks." Kelsey smiled at the older woman. "There was a drastic improvement after Dave left." She made a face and quickly asked, "Should I feel bad saying that?"

"Of course not!" Maggie patted her arm. "It is what it is. Not every person is right for every group."

"I'm glad to hear that things have been going more smoothly with you all since we found a different group for Dave," Evan said. "He seems to be getting along fine in his new group. It's a men's breakfast group and all the men are around the same age as Dave. They seem to take his personality in stride. I actually had breakfast with them last week, and I feel really good about how it's turned out."

"Good," Tyler sounded relieved. "Dave is the one thing I didn't really feel good about when I looked back over the last six months. I kind of felt like I failed."

"Not at all." Evan shook his head. "Like Maggie said, not every person is right for every group. Sometimes people have to try a group or two before finding the right fit. It's all good."

Tyler nodded and changed the subject. "Hey, I've not had a chance to tell you yet, but Devonte called me last night. He wants to start an Embrace Group!"

“Really?” Evan smiled.

“Yeah.” Tyler nodded. “He said he’s thought about it off and on since our first Embrace Day several months ago. Remember how I told you that his friends showed up and we ended up playing ball with them? And how I asked Devonte to pray before we left?”

Evan nodded.

“Well. He said he’s been in contact with that group of guys a lot more since that day at the park. He said they’re not really interested in going to church with him yet, but they’ve been open to him talking about it. He wants to start an Embrace Group with a couple of his friends from Faith Promise and his old friends to play ball once a week.” Tyler looked proud. “I told him I thought it was an awesome idea.”

“I like it!” Evan agreed.

Tyler continued, “He’s going to continue with us in our Encounter group, so we’re not losing him yet. He’s going to do both.”

“Good. He’s still a young Christian. I’m glad he’s not planning to leave your group just yet.”

“We really are very proud of you two,” Maggie said. “You’ve grown into your roles as group leaders so well!”

Evan added, “We knew you would. Even though you were kind of reluctant to take the plunge,” he grinned at Tyler, “you have exceeded all our expectations. God has changed lives through your service in this group. Your willingness to step up and lead a group created a space that embodied Faith Promise’s mission to ‘Help real people with real problems find real love.’ Not only that, but your Encounter Group is birthing Devonte’s Embrace Group, Michael and Sarah’s Expand Group, and Alex and Emily’s Engage Group. That may be a record for a first-time group leader. You should be very proud of yourselves. I know we’re awfully proud of you.”

Tyler felt a little embarrassed at the lavish praise, but the truth of the matter was that he was proud of himself. Stepping out of his comfort zone had been hard, but it had turned out to be one of the most rewarding experiences of his life. something. He had already talked to Dave about his negativity in group.





SECTION 2

# *Reference Guide*

# Following Jesus

Our number one priority as group leaders is to follow Jesus and lead others to do the same. We call this being a disciple of Jesus Christ. Yes, you are a shepherd, a leader, a friend, a facilitator of growth and so much more. But first and foremost, you are a disciple of Jesus. In the context of fpGroups, that means...

1. You follow Jesus.
2. You lead your group members to do the same.

## *What does it mean to follow Jesus?*

A follower of Jesus encounters God on a consistent basis through the study and application of God's Word and prayer.

A follower of Jesus embraces people and values relationships on a more meaningful level so everyone can grow together.

A follower of Jesus engages and serves the world around them in their community through local partners or God-directed opportunities.

A follower of Jesus expands God's Kingdom through development and multiplication of disciple-makers in order to form more groups at Faith Promise.

Evan used this model to evaluate Tyler's spiritual condition. We encourage group coaches to check-in with leaders in this way and for group leaders to do the same with group members.

*How are you Encountering God?*

*How are you Embracing Others?*

*How are you Engaging the World Around You?*

*How are you Expanding God's Kingdom?*

*What are some different ways to experience or add each of these benchmarks to your story?*

We believe these four values are not only applicable for evaluating the health of the group, but for assisting in an honest discussion concerning the spiritual condition of each member of the group, as well. If we don't follow Jesus, we simply will not be able to lead others to do the same.

## *Encountering God*

Tyler and Kelsey's group is very similar to most Faith Promise groups. And Chapter 2 provides both a great framework for the first group meeting (don't forget the name tags!) and an easy way to lay out expectations and goals for a successful group.

Encounter Groups are where real people consistently experience, encounter, and grow in their relationship with God through the study and application of God's Word and prayer.

1. Focus on the study and application of God's Word. This is best accomplished through Weekend Discussion Guides, the Discovery Bible Study method, book studies and/or video-driven curriculum through resources like Right Now media.
2. Typically meet weekly in homes, with a few exceptions that may be offered each semester at one of our campus locations. These groups typically break down in dyads and triads during their weekly groups.
3. Are expected to carry out the other three values of fpGroups: Embrace others, Engage the world around them and Expand God's Kingdom.

Throughout the story, notice how Tyler and Kelsey not only encourage and lead the group to experience all four values, but also organically identify and draw out group members to take ownership and become champions for each value.

*What value(s) comes the most natural for your group? Who can champion that value(s)?*

*What value(s) presents the biggest challenge for your group? Who can champion that value(s)?*

Groups may take many forms, but groups that do not consistently experience each value and encourage and challenge every group member to do the same, risk limiting their growth and developing an incomplete form of discipleship.

For more resources on starting a group (including the Group Covenant) connect with your coach, check out Chapter Fourteen, or visit (<https://faithpromise.org/groups/leaders>).

## *Embracing Others*

Chapter Three is one of the best pictures for the possibilities of what a group embracing others can look like in the real world. Even though the group had only been together a short time (five weeks), they “counted each other as friends.” This kind of connection in such a short period of time is truly possible when a group leverages the value of embracing others.

Embrace Groups value relationships and belonging on a more meaningful level so everyone can grow together.

1. Focus on making and being real people and friends on a deeper level. This is best accomplished through groups formed around a common interest or passion.
2. Typically meet a minimum of twice a month around their common interest and connect in dyads and triads throughout the month for accountability and support. We encourage the group work through Disciples Making Disciples, which is available in every campus Resource Center.
3. Are expected to carry out the other three values of fpGroups: Encounter God, Engage the world around them and Expand God’s Kingdom.

A common misconception about this value and groups formed around it, is that it is somehow a less important or less spiritual component of group life. This is simply not true. Only in moments of true community and belonging are people most open and transparent.

For Jenna, commiserating over a hard day at work and difficult season in her life could have felt out of place in a time perceived to be planned and scheduled. What she needed most was “her girls,” her friends, and her group to remind her in a social setting, “We’re here for you.”

For Devonte, connecting with friends far from God and revealing this part of his faith was only possible within the context of just playing around at the park with some friends from group—even creating an opportunity for him to start his own Embrace group by the end of the story. For both, the value of embracing others played a critical role in their growth and discipleship.

***What are some ways your group can live out this value of embracing others?***

***If you’re in an Embrace Group, what are some ways for your group to live out the other values?***

For ideas on what kinds of Embrace Groups are currently available or what kind of Embrace group you would like to start, connect with your coach, or visit (<https://faithpromise.org/groups/search>).

## *Engaging the World Around Us*

In Chapter Five, Alex is released to live and lead out his gifting to serve a family in the community. Too many times we can make serving in our own lives and in our group an unnecessary and overly-complicated chore. Sometimes all we need is a little direction.

Engage Groups serve the world around them in their communities through local partners or God-directed opportunities.

1. Focus on serving the real people and problems of our area through our local partners and through God-directed opportunities.
2. Typically serve twice a month, form around a common mission, and connect in dyads or triads throughout the month for accountability and support. We encourage the group work through Disciples Making Disciples, which is available in every campus Resource Center.
3. Are expected to carry out the other three values of fpGroups: Encounter God, Embrace others and Expand God's Kingdom.

Alex knew this family through his job as a social worker. It really is that simple. If everyone in the group keeps our eyes open to serve the people in our communities or anyone who crosses our paths, we will probably have all the opportunities to serve we could ever need.

Once again, notice how Tyler and Kelsey identified Alex's passion and empowered him to lead their group and champion this value. This disciple-making level of delegation is exactly what prepared Alex and his wife Emily to be able to later start their own Engage group.

*What are some ways your group can live out this value of engaging the world?*

*If you're in an Embrace Group, what are some ways for your group to live out the other values?*

For ideas on what kinds of Engage Groups are currently available or what kind of Engage group you would like to start, connect with your coach or visit (<https://faithpromise.org/groups/search>). For listings of local partners, projects, and upcoming opportunities visit (<https://faithpromise.org/love-local>).

## *Expand God's Kingdom*

All the way back in Chapter One the seeds for expanding are planted, resulting in a bountiful harvest of new groups by the end of the story. This value is something that should be planted at the very first group meeting, regardless of the kind of group. Remember, first and foremost we are about following Jesus and leading others to do the same. In short, making disciples.

Expand Groups actively make disciples through development and multiplication of disciple-makers, in order to form more groups at Faith Promise.

1. Focus on the development and multiplication of disciple-makers leading to more groups at Faith Promise. These groups are formed for the purposes of rapid multiplication. Group members will observe, lead with guidance and then multiply out to lead a new group.
2. Typically meet weekly in homes, with a few exceptions that may be offered each semester at one of our campus locations. We encourage the group work through Disciples Making Disciples, which is available in every campus Resource Center. These groups typically break down in dyads and triads during their weekly groups.
3. Are expected to carry out the other three values of fpGroups: Encounter God, Embrace others and Engage the world around them.

In Chapter Six, Michael and Sarah are given the opportunity to lead and are challenged by Dave. Empowering and developing an apprentice leader can be challenging sometimes...

*How does Tyler support and enable Michael to facilitate and lead the group discussion?*

*What are some ways your group can live out this value of expanding God's Kingdom?*

*If you're in an Expand Group, what are some ways for your group to live out the other values?*

For ideas on what kinds of Expand Groups are available or if you would like to begin an Expand group, connect with your coach or visit (<https://faithpromise.org/groups/search>).

# Facilitation

In Chapter Six, Michael facilitated the discussion, kept the conversation moving and encouraged the group to grow together. Unfortunately, Dave saw things differently. The group doesn't have to agree on everything, except this: We grow together.

We grow most, when we grow together.

*What are some ways to keep the conversation and discussion moving in your group?*

When one member of the group monopolizes the conversation, there's little time or opportunity left for anyone else. People may learn from a teacher, but almost no one grows during a lecture.

*How can you encourage your group members to take ownership in a discussion?*

*If you are in an Embrace or Engage group, what are some ways you can facilitate discussion each time you meet?*

For ideas on how to facilitate better discussions and other useful group leader tools, connect with your coach or visit (<https://faithpromise.org/groups/training>).

## *Weekend Discussion Guide*

Leading a group, being the host home, preparing a meal, arranging the activity, planning the service project, taking the attendance, living out the four values, having an apprentice, connecting with your coach and with everyone in the group – are we forgetting anything?

Oh yea, what are we going to be discussing in group this week?!

Whether you are a new leader or a seasoned veteran, we want you to know that we understand and have your back. This resource is also a great tool for raising up an apprentice leader in your group. (By the way – you shouldn't be doing everything by yourself either.)

Each and every week, a team of writers study the weekend sermon notes and develop a resource that is available by Saturday. We call it the Weekend Discussion Guide and it is the single best resource for ensuring your group has a lively discussion based out of the shared experience of the previous Faith Promise weekend experience.

***What are some ways to ensure everyone has seen the previous weekend message prior to group?***

This resource is also flexible by design and available digitally, making it an ideal option for Embrace and Engage groups looking for an impactful conversation that suits their unique meeting challenges.

*How could your group best use the Weekend Discussion Guides?*

Here are just a few ways to access the Weekend Discussion Guide.

1. Visit Faith Promise Sermons - (<https://faithpromise.org/sermons>), click on the weekend's message, then Discussion Guide.
2. Join the Faith Promise Group Leader's Facebook Group—guide is posted weekly.
3. Visit Faith Promise Blog (<http://blog.faithpromise.org/>)—guide is posted weekly.

For more ideas on how to access and best utilize Weekend Discussion Guides and other resources, connect with your coach or visit (<https://faithpromise.org/groups/leaders>)

# *Real People, Real Problems, Real Love*

Poor Dave.

Bad news: Sometimes there's a Dave in your group.

Great news: If Dave isn't a good fit for your group, that doesn't mean there isn't a group for him somewhere at Faith Promise.

***What are some ways to help a Dave if they show up in your group?***

Now before we go off and just assume anyone we don't get along with is a Dave, let's remember the mission of Faith Promise Church:

*To help real people with real problems find real love.*

Let's not write people off in our groups at the first sign of awkwardness or discomfort.

***What are some of the ways Tyler tried to help Dave connect with the group?***

If we look closely, Dave wasn't the only one in the group with real problems. Marcus and Chantel had marital issues that required counseling and Jenna had a substance abuse problem that needed a time of healing in fjoCelebrate. We all have problems.

*What are some of the ways Tyler and Kelsey helped the others when problems arose?*

When real people with real problems show up, remember to first love and help them connect, encourage them to find the help and healing they need, and if necessary find a group that is a better fit.

For more information on the resources, counseling and healing ministries available, connect with your coach or visit (<https://faithpromise.org/groups/leaders>)

# *Value the Process*

As Faith Promise group leadership, we must believe in and commit to valuing the process. Without this, we risk greatly diminishing our effectiveness, longevity, and ability to make disciples. This is why we will often communicate with you about...

## ***Living out the Four Values***

Through an Encounter Group (going through a study together in a living room), our fictional leaders modeled leading a group that was committed to occasional “Value Days” – from grilling out and playing at the park (Embrace), to building a handicap ramp (Engage), to eventually launching three new and different kinds of groups (Expand). No kind of group is greater than the other, but no group is complete without ALL FOUR values lived out.

## ***Connecting with Coach***

Time and time again Tyler demonstrates the value of maintaining a close relationship with a coach for support and guidance. Remember the FP Core Value we most personify is, “We Grow Together.” When in doubt, the first call should be to your coach. The coach is also an incredible asset and means of support in your personal spiritual story.

## ***Valuing Attendance***

This may seem like just e-paperwork—but go back and read the story closely—notice how Tyler and Kelsey used Dave’s absence to better assess his state of mind and fit with the group during the relationship study. Turning in attendance is a valuable tool to catching clues of the spiritual health, busyness, or an early indicator of hidden issues of a group member not yet revealed.

### ***Apprentices***

Tyler and Kelsey may have initially considered themselves ‘cornered’ into becoming group leaders, but their former group leaders, Evan and Maggie, clearly had made a meaningful and lasting impact on the younger couple. This was not an investment that happened overnight, but a slow and deliberate relationship that blossomed over time as Evan and Maggie poured in into their group members.

### ***Dyads-Triads***

Like any good team, Tyler and Kelsey each noticed possible trouble in Marcus and Chantel’s marriage. But notice how much more valuable connecting with each spouse individually was in helping Tyler and Kelsey discern how they could best help their members. Groups that spend weekly time in Dyads-Triads experience a multiplying factor in deepening relationships.

### ***Serving in Community*** *(...and sharing the story with us)*

How great was it that this group helped a family in such need? And how meaningful was it for that family? Now imagine their group is the only one that ever knows about it. This should never be the case! When your group engages the world through a service project or day, let us know ([groups@faithpromise.org](mailto:groups@faithpromise.org)) all about it. Stories are meant to be lived and then shared!

### ***Resources*** *(Weekend Discussion Guides / Discovery Bible Study / Right Now Media)*

Our fictional leaders used the resources available to every Faith Promise Group. We highly recommend Weekend Discussion Guides for any kind of group, but especially for Embrace and Engage Groups, which greatly benefit from a more conversational and casual style. We also highly recommend that any new group use this valuable resource while in the early stages of formation.

### ***Connection Weekends***

Like many real Faith Promise groups, Tyler and Kelsey’s group started from a Connection Weekend. Do you think it was a coincidence that Evan and Maggie approached Tyler and Kelsey about becoming group

leaders just prior to a Connection Weekend? Who knows for sure, they are fictional people after all, but probably not...

These weekends provide an incredible opportunity to refresh after a recent expansion. Ask your Coach when the next Connection Weekend is planned.

***Why are the Faith Promise group values important for every group?***

If you didn't find the answers you were looking for, let us know so we can help you and improve and update this valuable resource for future leaders. Connect with your coach or email us ([groups@faithpromise.org](mailto:groups@faithpromise.org)).

