

# A Book Club Discussion Guide for *The Tug*

A Memoir of Failure, Faith, and the Quiet Voice That's Been Guiding You All Along

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For book clubs, reading circles, and anyone who wants to go deeper. This guide works for groups of any background, faith-based or not, because the questions are about your life, not your theology. This guide, and a companion ten-session Bible study, are free to download, copy, and share at [www.johngoehle.com](http://www.johngoehle.com).

**A note for the host.** You do not need to be an expert, and you do not need to get through every question. Pick the ones that spark your group. The best discussions happen when people tell their own stories, which is, after all, exactly how John wrote the book. Consider opening each meeting by asking whether anyone felt their own “tug” while reading that week.

One more thing, and it matters. *The Tug* does not end with a feeling. It ends with an assignment: name the thing you have been putting off, say it out loud to another person, and take one small step, one *inch*, within the week. The closing exercise in this guide is built to send your group home with exactly that. If you do nothing else, do that.

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## Opening Questions (for your first meeting)

1. Before reading, had you ever thought of that inner voice, your gut, your conscience, your intuition, as something you should actively *listen* to? Has the book changed that?
2. John tells his life through stories and quotes rather than straight advice. Did that work for you? Which story has stayed with you?

## On the Stories

3. In the Author's Note, John draws a careful line: his daughters tease him that the couch took a weekend, not two weeks. He answers, “I have never made a story up. I have just never been able to leave one the size I found it.” Is there a real difference between stretching a story and inventing one? Did his confessing it up front make you trust him more, or less?
4. Kirk's death at sixteen sits at the center of the book. How did the chapter about him (“Sixteen Years”) affect you? Has a loss ever changed the way you live?
5. Mrs. Castner saw something in John that he could not see in himself. Who has done that for you, and have you ever done it for someone else?
6. The diamond sat forgotten in a closet for years before becoming an engagement ring. What “good things” in your own life arrived through doors you would not have chosen?
7. Abigail the dog fled her shelter to sit out in the storm. Where do people you know, or you yourself, run *from* the very things that could keep them safe?

8. As a small boy, with his father working away from home, John sat at the top of the stairs in the dark because he had decided he was guarding the house and the family. What did you appoint yourself to before anyone asked you to? Do you still do it?

### On the Big Ideas

9. John says he does not regret a single decision, even the painful ones, because every road led to people and lessons he would never give up. Do you agree that regret is, as he puts it, “the fantasy that you could keep the good while subtracting the pain”? Is there anything you regret that this reframes?
10. “God almost never arrives in the limousine. God arrives on the donkey.” John argues the important things show up small, ordinary, and easy to miss, which is exactly why we miss them. What donkey have you walked right past while watching the road for a limousine?
11. The book wrestles honestly with fate versus free will, whether life is a pattern God set or simply random. Where do you land, and did the book move you at all?
12. John distinguishes *success* (what you accumulate) from *significance* (what you leave behind). Which have you been chasing? Has that balance shifted over your life?
13. He argues that nothing in his past was wasted, that even the detours were preparation. Looking at your own life, can you see a “curriculum” in things that once felt random?

### Looking Inward

14. What is the one thing you have been putting off, the call, the leap, the apology, the dream, that the book made you think about?
15. If you wrote a one-sentence personal mission statement, like John’s “I am a learner, a teacher, and a healer,” what might yours be?
16. John was in New York City on 9/11 and calls that beautiful, terrible morning the moment he truly came to believe. Where were you that day, and has a single morning ever divided your life into a “before” and an “after”?
17. In “Touch,” John holds his newborn daughter and, years later, must help decide to release his dying father. He says holding on and letting go “are both just love, doing what the season requires.” Have you had to do both? What did each ask of you?
18. John tells of carrying a teacher’s words for decades and finally going to thank her, and of a principal he went to thank too late. Is there someone you need to thank while you still can?

### On the Ending

19. The book refuses to ask you to leap. Instead it asks for an inch, because John is the man who needed six months to change his brand of milk and moved a couch an inch a day. Every real change in his life looked like a leap only to people who were not watching closely. Is asking for an inch instead of a leap a lowering of the bar, or is it the only thing that has ever actually worked?
20. In the Afterword, John admits this book had no professional editor, and apologizes to you for whatever polish that cost, because he was not willing to hand it over and risk it coming back as someone else’s. Was that the right trade? Would you have made it?
21. He also admits he learned more about himself in the writing than he managed to hand across to you in the reading, and he suspects your own life has a shape you have simply never sat down and looked at. When did you last look at yours?

22. The book ends with a single word: *Go*. What, specifically, is yours to go and do?

### A Closing Exercise

Go around the circle, and have each person finish these two sentences out loud:

*"The tug I have been ignoring is..."*

*"The inch I will take before we meet again is..."*

You need not solve anything. Naming it, together, is the whole exercise, and the inch is the whole point. Have someone write them down.

Then, when your group next gathers, before you talk about anything else, go around once more and ask the only question that finally matters: **did you take it?**

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