

BOOMERANG

THE SIX-WEEK SYSTEM TO SEE MORE CHURCH GUESTS RETURN

GROUP DISCUSSION GUIDE

Leader's Edition

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Part of the free Boomerang Kit

Using This Guide

Your Guest Care team is in charge of making big picture vision a reality. On a Sunday morning. On a Tuesday afternoon. On a Thursday evening. The vision of a church who intentionally follows up with their guests and invites them into community and the details of how to practically do that week in and week out can sometimes feel like opposing forces. That team is pouring their heart into this work. This guide was built for them.

This discussion guide walks your leadership team, your hospitality team, or your volunteer team through the book through the system - chapter by chapter, and turns each one into a working session. By the last page, you will not just have finished a book. You will have mapped out how your church gathers guest information, connects with every guest personally, and builds a follow-up system that runs faithfully, every week.

Use it alongside the book or the audiobook. Read or listen to a chapter before you meet, then work through the questions together. Whether you gather weekly for a few months or cover a section per meeting, the goal is the same: no guest slips through the cracks at your church again.

How to Use This Guide

Each chapter in this guide has three parts: a short summary of the big idea, the discussion questions we consider the strongest, and a bank of alternate questions you can swap in based on your team and your context.

A few things we have learned from churches that do this well. First, do not try to use every question. Pick the ones that fit where your team is, and let one good conversation run long rather than rushing through seven. Second, write things down. These questions will surface gaps in your guest experience. Capture each one, assign it an owner, and revisit the list when you reach Section 3. That running list becomes the blueprint for your system. Third, end every meeting the way the book ends every chapter: decide what you will do before next Sunday. Small moves every week beat a big plan nobody starts.

One more thing. Some of these questions get personal. They ask about the times your church missed someone, and maybe the times you were the one who was missed. Give those questions room. The teams that build the best follow-up systems are the ones that remember what silence feels like.

This Leader's Edition contains everything your group sees, plus four layers that are yours alone: a Before the Meeting prep note, The Win for each session so you know when you are done, follow-up probes under key questions, and a bank of alternate questions you can swap in. Your group's Participant Edition contains only the summaries, the core questions, and the commitment boxes. You are holding the map; they are making the journey.



Your Journey Tracker

Seventeen sessions. Check them off as your team works through the book.

Session	Date	Done
The Introduction & The Boomerang System		
Chapter 1: The Guest's First Seven Minutes		
Chapter 2: The Welcome Talk		
Chapter 3: Building Trust With Your Guests		
Chapter 4: The Red Balloon		
Chapter 5: What Happens After the Sermon?		
Chapter 6: The Silent Goodbye		
Chapter 7: Butter Brickle Ice Cream		
Chapter 8: The Throw Formula		
Chapter 9: The Three Phases		
Chapter 10: The Six-Week Plan		
Chapter 11: The 98 Percent		
Chapter 12: The System That Cares While You Sleep		
Chapter 13: Build It Once. Run It Forever.		
Chapter 14: Know Your Number		
Chapter 15: When They Text Back		
Before Next Sunday & Your First Thirty Days		





The Introduction & The Boomerang System

Before The Meeting

Read the Introduction and The Boomerang System before the meeting. Bring one number if you can find it: how many first-time guests visited in the last month. If nobody knows, that silence is part of tonight's conversation.

The Win

Your team agrees on the honest current state of your follow-up and owns the problem without shame. The enemy tonight is the missing system, not anyone in the room.

The Big Idea

Tyler opens with the problem nobody sees happening: the silent goodbye. Last Sunday, first-time guests sat in your services. Something hard or hopeful brought them there. And research says only 10 to 20 percent of them will ever come back. Not because Sunday was bad, but because in the six days that followed, they never heard from you. As one Text In Church teammate puts it, "no one drifts into a community, but they can drift out."

The Boomerang System chapter then lays out the entire book in three words. Gather their information. Connect with them personally. Build a system that does not depend on anyone remembering. And it closes with the line that governs everything that follows: "The system is never the point. The person is. The system just makes sure you actually reach them."

Discussion Questions

Before reading this book, how would you have explained why first-time guests at our church did or didn't come back? Have we taken a more passive, "drift" approach to guests?

Tyler says guests usually show up because something happened: a move, a loss, a diagnosis, a new baby. Think about the last guest you personally met. Do you know what brought them in? If not, what would change if you did?

Be honest as a team: if a family visited last Sunday, what would they actually hear from our church this week? Walk through it hour by hour, Sunday afternoon to Saturday night.

If the room is quiet: Start with just Sunday afternoon: does anything at all happen automatically when a guest leaves?

Push further: Now imagine that family comparing our week of silence to the reminder texts they got from their kid's soccer league the same week.

Tyler's brother Matt's pushback was that automated follow-up feels like customer support rather than ministry. Where does our team land on that tension right now? What would need to be true for a system to feel like care instead of a machine?

If the room is quiet: Forget the technology for a second: does automated follow-up feel more like the Southwest text or more like a robocall to you? What makes the difference?

Push further: If a guest could not tell whether a human or a system sent the message, does it matter? Why or why not?

Before Next Sunday

What we will do?

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Who owns it?

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By when?

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More Questions to Choose From

Swap any of these in, or use them for a second session on this chapter.

1. Pastor Eric's question froze the room: "Ok, so who is going to be in charge of this?" If someone asked that about guest follow-up at our church today, what would happen? Crickets, a name, or a fight?
2. The book says "caring requires a system, and most churches don't have one." Which half of that sentence describes us better?
3. What is our church's version of the whiteboard plan: something we designed with great intentions that quietly died? Why did it die?
4. Tyler describes the stack of connect cards on the corner of a desk "sitting there like a small accusation." Where do our connect cards physically go after Sunday? Does anyone know?
5. Bob Farr told Tyler two weeks of follow-up could never change a life pattern; it takes at least six. Does six weeks of contact sound loving or pushy to you? Why?
6. The U.S. Surgeon General declared loneliness a national epidemic. How does that reality change what a first visit to our church actually means to the person making it?
7. Picture the Sunday night Tyler describes: dinner on the table, and the system caring for this morning's guests while you rest. What would that peace be worth to our team?
8. Which of the three words, Gather, Connect, or Build, is our church weakest at today? What is our evidence?
9. Who at our church loses sleep over the people who slip through the cracks? What have we handed that person besides good intentions?
10. If we welcomed ten guests this month and eight or nine never came back, would we know? How?
11. What is one thing you hope is different about our church by the time we finish this book?



Section

1

Gather

Everything that happens before a guest ever gives you their name. The book says it plainly: "Consistency is loving. Gathering is where it starts, with something as small as a name and a number." These three chapters cover the first seven minutes, the Welcome Talk, and the moment a guest decides whether to trust you with their contact information.



BOOMERANG



The Guest's First Seven Minutes

Before The Meeting

Walk your own building alone before the meeting, parking lot to seat, and take notes. List the five points where everyone can see them: arrival and parking, the walk-in, the greeting, the lobby, finding a seat.

The Win

Your team names the weakest of the five points in your Welcome Window and commits an auditor and a date before leaving the room.

The Big Idea

The chapter opens with Ryan Keim's team at Bachelor Creek Church of Christ and their 10-4 rule: eye contact and a smile at ten feet, a greeting at four, and space for the guest who looks away. It ends with the story that should stay with your team: the woman at Ali's own church who built up the courage to show up and later told her, "Honestly, I just wanted to meet someone. I have no friends and desperately need community." She was smiling on the outside and pleading on the inside, and nobody introduced themselves. Because, as Ali writes, "A friendly church can be one of the loneliest places on earth for a guest, because all that warmth is pointed inward." Her mantra for everything in this section: "Hospitality prompts connection. That's our mantra. If it doesn't, it's unnecessary."

Discussion Questions

Walk through the first seven minutes at our church as a group, right now, from memory: parking, walk-in, greeting, lobby, finding a seat. At which of the five points would a nervous first-timer feel most uncertain? Where is our strongest point?

If the room is quiet: Just picture last Sunday: who was the first human a guest saw, and what were they doing?

Push further: Which of the five points would we defend the hardest if a guest criticized it? Why does that one make us defensive?

Ali distinguishes between friendly and welcoming: friendly is how you treat people you already know; welcoming is how you treat people you don't know yet. Which one is our church actually good at? What is one specific Sunday moment that proves it?

The book says to stop calling them visitors and start calling them guests, because you prepare for a guest. What language does our team use, and what does it reveal about how we think?

Who will audit our seven minutes before next Sunday, parking where a first-timer parks and walking in the door a first-timer uses? Pick the person and the date before this meeting ends.

If the room is quiet: Who on this team has actually walked in through the guest entrance in the last year?

Push further: What will we do if the audit embarrasses us? Decide that before we send anyone.

Before Next Sunday

What we will do?

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Who owns it?

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By when?

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More Questions to Choose From

Swap any of these in, or use them for a second session on this chapter.

1. The woman at Ali's church said, "I just wanted to meet someone." Could that story happen at our church this Sunday? What would have to change so it could not?
2. What does our church communicate in the parking lot, before anyone says a word?
3. Try the 10-4 rule on for size: eye contact at ten feet, greeting at four. Would that feel natural or forced for our greeters? What would training it look like?
4. The family at Bachelor Creek dressed up because they assumed it was required. What might guests wrongly assume about us before they arrive, and where would they get those assumptions?
5. Count the seconds honestly: how long would someone who is not paid or scheduled to be friendly take to speak to a stranger in our lobby?
6. Which entrance do half our guests actually use, and is anyone standing there?
7. Ali says signage tells guests this church was expecting them. If a stranger had to find the nursery, the bathroom, and a seat with no help, how would they do?
8. Who are the two people in our church who light up when a new face walks in? Are they on the hospitality team? Why or why not?
9. What is one barrier in our building, physical or social, that we have stopped seeing because we walk past it every week?
10. Ali warns that churches who think they have already nailed hospitality are sometimes the hardest to help. On a scale of one to ten, how confident were we in our guest experience before this chapter? And now?
11. If our first impression had to be reduced to one sentence a guest says in the car on the way home, what do we want that sentence to be?





The Welcome Talk

Before The Meeting

Bring notes or a recording of last Sunday's welcome moment, and a printed copy of the four steps: warm greeting, guest acknowledgment, one clear next step, vision cue. Budget half the meeting for actually writing.

The Win

Your team leaves with a drafted sixty-second Welcome Talk and a named person delivering it this Sunday.

The Big Idea

Every service has one moment when someone speaks directly to the whole room, and most churches waste it on announcements.

The fix fits in sixty seconds and four steps: a warm greeting that sets the emotional tone, a guest acknowledgment that says we see you without a spotlight, one clear next step instead of five announcements, and a vision cue that gives a guest one sentence they could repeat to a friend on the drive home. The three mistakes that ruin a good welcome: singling guests out, burying the welcome after eight minutes of announcements, and asking for too much. And the principle underneath it all: "Specificity kills fear of the unknown." Tell guests exactly what happens when they fill out the card, down to the text this afternoon and the email tomorrow.

Discussion Questions

Play back last Sunday's welcome moment as honestly as you can. Was it a welcome, or announcements with a friendly face? What did a first-time guest learn from it?

If the room is quiet: Roughly how long was our welcome moment last week? Time it in your head.

Push further: If a guest's only impression of our church were that moment, what would they say we care about most?

Of the three mistakes... singling guests out, burying the welcome, and asking for too much, which one are we most guilty of? What is the story behind how it became our habit?

Write our sixty-second Welcome Talk together, right now, using the four steps. Who should deliver it Sunday, and what makes them the right person?

If the room is quiet: Start with only step one: what is the first sentence out of our mouths?

Push further: Now cut the draft to sixty seconds. What got deleted, and why did we believe we needed it?

What is our one clear next step for a guest? If everyone on this team gives a different answer, what does that tell us?

The book moves announcements to slides, QR codes, weekly emails, and social media so the Welcome Talk can do its real job. What would we have to stop announcing from the stage, and who will resist that?

Before Next Sunday

What we will do?

Who owns it?

By when?

More Questions to Choose From

Swap any of these in, or use them for a second session on this chapter.

1. What does our current welcome moment ask a guest to do? Is it one easy yes or a menu?
2. Ali says guests on a first visit are not wondering about the mission trip; they want to know if they can belong and if God is listening when they cry out to Him. Does our service speak to that? Where?
3. If a guest could repeat one sentence about our church to a friend on the drive home, what sentence does our current service hand them?
4. Have we ever asked first-timers to stand, raise a hand, or wear something special? How do we honestly think that landed?
5. Where in our service does the Welcome Talk sit today, and what would it take to move it to the very top?
6. Ali suggests wrapping giving into the close of service instead of the announcements block. What would change for guests if we did?
7. Who could we ask this month for honest feedback on our welcome: a new attender, a friend from out of town, or a first-time guest we call?
8. What information do we currently deliver from the stage that a QR code, a slide loop, or an email could carry instead?
9. Ali is not sure the “who” matters as much as the “what.” Who delivers our welcome today, and are they set up to succeed?
10. Read the sample Welcome Talk from the chapter out loud. What would we keep, cut, or change to make it sound like us?





Building Trust With Your Guests

Before The Meeting

Bring your actual connect card, however it looks, and last month's card count if you can get it. Have someone ready to text BOOMERANG to 816-482-3337 live during the meeting.

The Win

Your team writes the exact from-the-stage sentence that tells guests why you want their information, and makes a follow-up promise with a speed attached to it.

The Big Idea

Ali opens with a bold statement: "It's worse to get a guest's contact information and do nothing with it than not to ask for it at all." Most churches have a connect card. Very few have a connect card strategy. And the trust math is harder than it used to be. Barna found that only half of millennials are comfortable sharing their last name with a church, one in three will share an email, and fewer than one in eight will share a phone number. Trust has to be earned before information gets handed over.

The chapter gives you three formats so every kind of guest has a comfortable way in: the paper card, the digital card, and Text a Keyword. But format is the easy part. The real lever is telling the why: "Transparency builds trust. And trust fills connect cards." Three things determine whether a guest says yes: clarity about what happens next, reciprocity that makes the trade feel worth it, and genuine connection, because nobody hands their number to a church where no one has spoken to them. Then keep the promise fast, the same day. If almost nobody fills out your beautiful cards, Ali's diagnosis is simple: "You don't have a connect card problem. You have a trust problem."

Discussion Questions

React to Ali's opening statement: Collecting information and doing nothing with it is worse than not asking at all. Has our church been guilty of that? What did it cost the guests who filled out a card and heard nothing?

Sit in a guest's seat this Sunday and listen to how the connect card is introduced. Would you fill it out? Would you want to share your phone number with our church on a first visit? Why or why not?

If the room is quiet: Forget church for a second: when did you last give your phone number to any organization, and what convinced you?

Push further: What did we do in the sixty minutes a guest was with us that would deserve their phone number?

Do we ever tell guests why we want their information and what will happen after they give it? Draft the exact sentence we would say from the stage.

What happens, step by step, to a paper card as it moves from the offering basket to our database? How many hands touch it, and where could it get dropped?

If the room is quiet: Start with yesterday: who physically touched the cards after service?

Push further: Which step would break first on a chaotic Sunday, and who would ever know it broke?

Before Next Sunday

What we will do?

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Who owns it?

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By when?

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More Questions to Choose From

Swap any of these in, or use them for a second session on this chapter.

1. The chapter says the connect card moment is our church's first chance to keep a promise. What promise are we willing to make out loud, and how fast can we actually keep it?
2. What questions are on our connect card right now? Which ones exist for our database instead of for a relationship?
3. Barna says fewer than one in eight millennials will share a phone number with a church. Does that number frustrate you or make sense to you? What earned that skepticism?
4. Churches in First Impressions Academy changed their language from "if you're new, fill out our card" to "if you're ready to get connected, fill out our card." What is the difference, and which do we say?
5. Try the keyword yourselves: have everyone on the team text BOOMERANG to 816-482-3337 and experience what a guest experiences. What did you notice?
6. How many connect cards did we receive in the last month? Does anyone in this room know the number without checking?
7. What happens, step by step, to a paper card between the offering basket and our database? How many hands touch it, and where could it die?
8. If a guest gave us their number Sunday at 11:30, when would they first hear from us? Is that answer a system or a hope?
9. The book says to make the ask a gift, not a transaction. What could we attach to our connect card that a guest would actually want?
10. Where would a digital card or a QR code serve people our paper card is missing: parents with full hands, younger guests, big outreach events?



Section

2

Connect

Turning a single Sunday into the start of a relationship. Gathering gets you a name. Connecting is what you do with it. These four chapters cover the systems that make noticing possible, the most unowned moment in your church, the silent goodbye, and the story behind why this whole book exists.



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The Red Balloon

Before The Meeting

Open the meeting by reading Ali's balloon story out loud, from the check-in counter to "the bright red balloons are a good giveaway." It takes two minutes and sets the whole conversation.

The Win

Your team chooses a red balloon experiment, one small repeatable signal, and names its owner.

The Big Idea

Ali was not visiting as an expert. She was a mom, new to Kansas City, walking into a big church with a one-year-old, a four-year-old, and the question every guest carries: will anyone notice us? After the service, her daughters came running out of the kids' wing with bright red balloons tied to little gift bags. And suddenly, in a packed lobby, several strangers approached the family, asked if they were new, and invited them back. Weeks later, a pastor told her the secret: "Well, the bright red balloons are a good giveaway." The balloon was not a decoration. It was the first step in a system that told every person in the building: "See the kid with the red balloon? That's a first-time guest. Go say hello."

A red balloon is "any small, repeatable signal that makes your whole church notice a guest without any one person having to remember to. The balloon does the remembering. The people get to do the loving."

Discussion Questions

Ali's family had visited other churches where nobody noticed them. What made the red balloon church different was not warmer people; it was a system that made warmth possible. Does that distinction change how anyone on this team feels about the word "system"?

What is our church's red balloon today? If we do not have one, what small, repeatable signal could tell our whole congregation who the first-time guests are, without putting a spotlight on them?

If the room is quiet: What do we already hand guests or their kids that could quietly become the signal?

Push further: How do we keep the signal warm instead of it becoming a label? What stops it from feeling like a spotlight?

The balloon worked because everyone in the building knew what it meant. Whatever signal we pick, how would we teach the whole church to respond to it, not just the hospitality team?

Ali says her family was noticed by "multiple people" who were "genuine about it. Not performing hospitality." What is the difference between genuine and performed hospitality, and can a guest really tell? Can we?

Who owns our red balloon? The book says a signal nobody owns runs on luck and good memory, "and both of those run out on a busy Sunday." Name the owner before this meeting ends.

If the room is quiet: Who noticed guests last Sunday without being asked to? Start there.

Push further: If the owner is gone for three Sundays in a row, what happens to the signal?

Before Next Sunday

What we will do?

Who owns it?

By when?

More Questions to Choose From

Swap any of these in, or use them for a second session on this chapter.

1. The gift bags included follow-up materials tied to the kids' lesson, so the conversation continued in the car. What do our kids take home, and what conversation does it start?
2. Ali felt relief when her kids came out happy. For a visiting parent, how much of the return decision is really about the kids' experience? Does our follow-up ever mention the kids?
3. What are the moments in our Sunday when a guest is most invisible? What signal could make them impossible to miss in exactly those moments?
4. Think about the check-in worker who walked Ali's family to the kids' rooms. Which of our volunteers are already doing red balloon work without a system behind them?
5. The chapter says the system frees people to "just be people. Warm, present, genuinely glad you were there." Where do our volunteers spend energy remembering things a system could carry?
6. What almost kept Ali's family from coming back, even after a great service? What does that tell us about lobbies?
7. Ali writes that connecting is "rooted in Jesus' call to go after the one." Who is "the one" you personally picture when you hear that?
8. If our church adopted a different colored coffee cup for guests, a lanyard for family guides, or a text alert to the connections team, which fits our culture best and why?
9. What would it cost us to try a red balloon experiment for one month? What would we measure to know if it worked?
10. Ali has never forgotten how it felt "to be expected instead of just greeted." What is the difference, and which do guests get from us?





What Happens After the Sermon?

Before The Meeting

Know the date of your next newcomer gathering, if one exists. If it does not, be ready to say so plainly; that gap will come up in question five.

The Win

The ten minutes after service get an owner, and everyone in the room can state the one clear next step for a new guest.

The Big Idea

The closing prayer ends, the lobby fills, and the church happens: people talking, praying, making lunch plans. But who is looking out for the guest standing alone outside every circle? Ali names the problem precisely: "That moment in the lobby is the most unowned moment in your entire church." A guest might linger unnoticed for about ninety seconds. Then they start walking toward the door.

The chapter's fixes are ownership and clarity. Give the after-service window an owner whose only job is to identify unfamiliar faces and connect with them. Give guests one clear next step and a reason to visit the Welcome Center, remembering that "people can appreciate being part of a process, but no one wants to feel processed." Staff it with the person who considers it their actual ministry, because "If you have that person, you have a Welcome Center. If you don't, you have furniture." And underneath it all sits the oldest research in the book: newcomers who stayed had made an average of seven friends in the congregation within six months. The ones who left averaged two. As Ali puts it, "Friendship is the retention strategy."

Discussion Questions

Who owns the ten minutes after our service today? If the honest answer is "everyone," is it really "anyone"? Name one person or small team who could own it starting this Sunday.

If the room is quiet: Where do our staff and key leaders physically stand during the ten minutes after service? Picture last week.
Push further: What would we have to give that person permission to stop doing, including talking to friends, for them to own this well?

Ninety seconds. That is, at a maximum, how long a guest lingers before heading for the door. What does a guest see and feel in our lobby during their ninety seconds?

Ali writes, "people can appreciate being part of a process, but no one wants to feel processed." Where might a guest feel like they're being processed at our church? Where do they get real human connection?

Apply the furniture test: does our Welcome Center have the person who considers it their actual ministry, or does it just have furniture? Who is that person, or who could be?

If the room is quiet: Who shows up early and loves making introductions? That's the person.

Push further: If nobody fits, is our Welcome Center helping guests right now, or just comforting us?

Before Next Sunday

What we will do?

Who owns it?

By when?

More Questions to Choose From

Swap any of these in, or use them for a second session on this chapter.

1. Yeakley's research says staying is about making seven friends in six months. What at our church actually helps a brand-new person make a friend? Not meet a greeter. Make a friend.
2. What reason does a guest currently have to stop by our Welcome Center instead of slipping out the side door? Is it a reason we would respond to?
3. Greg Curtis teaches one clear step in one clear direction. When a guest asks "so what do I do now?", does everyone on our team give the same answer?
4. Donald Miller's line is quoted in this chapter: "If you confuse, you lose." Where might a guest feel confused in their first thirty minutes with us?
5. The chapter says to name the next step something like Welcome Center so guests know it is for them without a spotlight. What do we call ours, and does the name help or hide it?
6. What is our one clear next-step event for new people: a lunch, a coffee, a class? When is the next one on the calendar, and would anyone in this room know how to invite a guest to it?
7. Ali describes being directed to a website to sign up for a group that met in a stranger's home, and how risky that jump felt. What is the smallest, safest first step we offer?
8. Which alternate on-ramps do we have for guests who will not follow the ideal path: a standing social hour, groups that meet at the building, a serve team that lets someone shadow?
9. Walk through our handoff: card, basket, office, spreadsheet, follow-up. How many hands touch a guest's information, and where does it lose speed?
10. Greg Curtis says today's guests show up pre-vetted; they have already watched the sermons and checked the website, so when they give contact information they are ready to hear from someone. Does our speed match their readiness?
11. Who in our congregation loves talking to strangers and does not currently have a job on Sunday? What would it take to recruit them this month?





The Silent Goodbye

Before The Meeting

Pull whatever guest names you have from the last ninety days. Real names change this conversation from theory to people.

The Win

Your team adopts drift, not rejection, as the working explanation for lost guests, and one lapsed guest gets a message from someone in the room this week.

The Big Idea

There are 144 hours between one Sunday and the next, and somewhere inside them your guest is making a quiet, mostly subconscious decision about whether they will come back. Tyler's claim is that the deciding factor usually is not the sermon or the greeters. It is whether they heard from you. When guests do not return, there is no exit interview and no angry email. "They mean to come back. They just drift, and the silence lets them."

That reframe changes the job. "Most of the time, you are not fighting a rejection. You are fighting a drift. And a drift is beatable." The chapter introduces the 5-D Theory: people visit churches because of a Divorce, a Death, a Displacement, a Development, or a Disaster. They arrive equal parts desperate and distracted, squeezing church into a life that is already full. Which is why six weeks of follow-up is not bombarding people. In Tyler's words, "It's pursuing them the way you'd pursue any relationship you cared about."

Discussion Questions

Rejection versus drift: which one have we been designing for? How would our follow-up look different if we truly believed most guests drift rather than decide against us?

If the room is quiet: Think of a family who faded from us: was there a moment they decided to leave, or did it just happen?

Push further: If a drift is beatable with one text at the right moment, what has actually been stopping us from sending it?

Walk through the 5-D Theory: Divorce, Death, Displacement, Development, Disaster. Think of recent guests you know by name. Does this ring true? If you don't know, do you think it's important to understand why they're showing up for the first time? Why or why not?

If the room is quiet: Which of the five D's brought you to your current church? Go around the room.

Push further: How differently should our first-week messages read to a Divorce guest versus a Development guest? Should they?

The chapter says we err on the side of passivity because we do not want to be pushy, but guests can receive that as apathy or neglect. Where is the line between pursuing someone and pestering them? Who at our church decides where that line is?

Read Holly Howard's guest comments out loud, including "I have never felt so loved." What would it take for a guest at our church to say that about our follow-up?

Before Next Sunday

What we will do?

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Who owns it?

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By when?

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More Questions to Choose From

Swap any of these in, or use them for a second session on this chapter.

1. Tyler shares that his gym, his professor, and the parks department all followed up with him, and his church never did. What follows up with you more faithfully than most churches follow up with guests? How does that comparison sit with you?
2. What currently happens in the 144 hours between Sundays for a guest who visited us? Map it honestly, hour by hour.
3. Tyler walked away from church for a time and says the silence made him feel he did not mean anything unless he showed up like a "good Christian." Has anyone on our team lived a version of that story?
4. McIntosh and Arn found non-growing churches keep about 9 percent of first-time guests, growing churches about 21 percent. One more family a month staying is the difference. Which number is closer to ours, and how do we know?
5. Millennials are attending church weekly at higher rates than anyone expected. Does our follow-up assume the people walking in, or the people who walked in twenty years ago?
6. If a guest opted out of our messages, would we treat it as failure or as a win for honesty? What does the option to opt out communicate?
7. The average church adult attends 1.6 times per month. What does that math mean for a brand-new guest with no habit and no relationships here?
8. Tyler says a single text at the right moment "can be the hand that reaches into that fade." Has a small, well-timed message ever changed a decision for you?
9. Whose silence has our church been trusting as an answer? What would happen if we treated silence as the start of the conversation instead of the end?
10. Are we more comfortable blaming the culture, the schedule, or the noise than examining our own six days of silence? What would an outsider say?
11. The chapter says guests have started filling their Sunday time slot with something else, so returning requires a lifestyle change. What are we doing to make that change easier?





Butter Brickle Ice Cream

Before The Meeting

Read the chapter twice before this meeting and plan for a slower, quieter session. Leave silence after the first question. Consider opening or closing in prayer for the families who drifted from your church without a word.

The Win

Every person in the room names one family to reach out to this week. That is the whole win. Let the story do the work.

The Big Idea

This is the chapter where Tyler tells you why he cannot stop doing this work. When he was nine, his family moved to Kansas City to be near his grandpa, who was dying of cancer. They got three months. After the funeral, the grieving family looked for a church. They visited, sang the songs, shook hands, and walked out "the same strangers we'd walked in as." Then one Sunday, they just did not go. And nobody seemed to notice or care. Nobody followed up.

The cost was not their faith. "We didn't lose our faith. We still loved God. But the church had lost us, and it never even knew we were gone." And the diagnosis is the heart of the whole book: nobody at those churches meant to abandon them. "There was no decision made, no cruelty intended. They just didn't have a system." Tyler closes by pointing at your pews: families sitting there right now who are "one hard season away from slipping through that same crack, quietly, invisibly, without a word."

Discussion Questions

What stayed with you from Tyler's story? Say it out loud before we analyze anything.

If the room is quiet: One image from the story: the ice cream, the quiet Sunday mornings, walking out as strangers. Which one stuck with you?

Push further: Mechanically, why did that church never know the family was gone? What exactly was missing?

Nobody at those churches meant to abandon anyone. "They just didn't have a system." How does it change the conversation when the villain is the missing system instead of uncaring people?

Has anyone on this team lived the other side of this story: a season when you drifted, and nobody reached out? Or a season when one person's follow-up changed your direction? Tell it.

If the room is quiet: You don't have to tell the whole story. Just tell us when it happened.

Push further: What would have actually reached you in that season? Be specific: a call, a text, a knock, a name?

Tyler says families in your church right now are one hard season away from slipping through the same crack. Who came to mind as he said it? What would reaching out this week look like?

Before Next Sunday

What we will do?

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Who owns it?

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By when?

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More Questions to Choose From

Swap any of these in, or use them for a second session on this chapter.

1. Tyler's family was grieving, brand new to the city, and looking for a place to belong, and they were exactly the family a follow-up system would have caught. Who are the families in our community right now living some version of that season?
2. A nine-year-old could not name what the silence meant, but he felt it. How do kids experience a family's drift from church? What is at stake for them in our follow-up?
3. It took almost a decade for Tyler's family to find their way back. What compounds in a family during years away from church community?
4. Tyler says people visit when times are tough, and what they are really asking is "whether anyone in that building will notice them long enough to care." Is our Sunday built to answer that question?
5. The family kept attending for weeks before they stopped. The drift was visible if anyone was tracking it. Would we notice a four-week-old family going quiet today?
6. Tyler writes, "Follow-up is the answer to that question. It's the church saying, 'We saw you.'" What are the other ways our church says we saw you? Where does follow-up rank?
7. Why do you think Tyler waited until chapter 7 to tell this story? What did the first six chapters need to establish first?
8. What is your butter brickle: the personal reason this work matters to you? Share it with the team.
9. If Tyler's family visited our church this year, at exactly which point in our current process would they have been caught or lost?
10. The chapter ends: "Let's build something worthy of it." Worthy of what, exactly? Put it in your own words.
11. How does hearing the founder's personal story change the way you read the system chapters that come next?



Section

3

Build

The system that follows up faithfully, even on the weeks you can't. The section opens with a warning: "You can care deeply and still drop the ball, because caring is not a system, and memory is not a plan." And it introduces Faith Brown, who sent 60 to 120 personal texts every week until she found a better way: "Faith wasn't failing at follow-up. She WAS the follow-up." These eight chapters turn everything you have discussed into a functioning system.



BOOMERANG



The Throw Formula

Before The Meeting

Bring printed copies of the last three messages a real guest actually received from your church. Scoring gets honest fast when the evidence is on the table.

The Win

Your team scores itself on the four R's, names its lowest score out loud, and picks the one Four-I failure it will kill first.

The Big Idea

A boomerang only comes back when the throw is right, and Ali gives the throw four requirements: your follow-up must be Reliable, have Rhythm, stay Relevant, and build Rapport. Get the four R's right and guests come back. Get them wrong, and you have random messaging people ignore. The chapter also names the four ways churches quietly kill their own follow-up, the Four I's: Inconsistency, Irrelevancy, Insufficiency, and Impersonal.

But the deepest reframe in the chapter comes from Greg Curtis: "You can't disciple an unconnected person." Which means follow-up is not paperwork. Follow-up is not an administrative task. A text on Sunday evening is a ministry moment. A phone call that asks how to pray for someone is the beginning of a relationship. Follow-up opens the door for discipleship.

Discussion Questions

Score our current follow-up from one to five on each of the four R's: Reliable, Rhythm, Relevant, Rapport. Where do we score lowest, and what is one real example that explains the score?

If the room is quiet: Start with Reliable: did every guest from last week get the same follow-up, or did it depend on who noticed them?

Push further: Whose feelings are we protecting by scoring ourselves generously? What does the guest experience score us?

Which of the Four I's is most alive at our church: Inconsistency, Irrelevancy, Insufficiency, or Impersonal? The book says naming it means you can fix it.

Sit with Greg Curtis's line: "You can't disciple an unconnected person." If follow-up really is the first step toward discipleship, how should that change who owns it and how seriously we resource it?

Ali says most churches quit too early: a welcome email, maybe a text, then nothing, because "Insufficiency is not usually a failure of caring. It is a failure of stamina." When has our church started something relational and run out of stamina? What does that history teach us about building this?

If the room is quiet: Name one relational effort we started strong. What month did it quietly stop?

Push further: What would this plan need so it survives the exact week that killed the last one?

Before Next Sunday

What we will do?

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Who owns it?

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By when?

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More Questions to Choose From

Swap any of these in, or use them for a second session on this chapter.

1. Walk Marcos and Dana through our church instead of the imaginary one: a young couple visits in March and mentions a toddler. Trace what actually happens to them over six weeks with us. Where does their story break down?
2. Which messages has our church sent guests that treated them like returning members: fundraiser announcements, volunteer sign-ups, event calendars? What did those messages assume?
3. What does a first-time guest actually need in their first week? The book says warmth, welcome, and a low-stakes reason to come back. What do we currently give them?
4. Ali admits her church had all four I's running at once, "a perfect combo of good intentions going nowhere." Why is it comforting to hear that from the person writing the book?
5. A text that says "we noticed you" is ministry; a blast about the building campaign is marketing. Can a guest tell which one they got from us? How?
6. Where does our follow-up usually stop, and is that before or after most guests have decided?
7. Rapport means the prayer request gets followed up on by name. What happens today when a guest shares something personal on a card or in a reply?
8. Which of the four R's comes most naturally to our church culture? How could we build the system around that strength?
9. The follow-up that works is still showing up in week three and week five, after the noise settles. What would our week-five touch even be right now?
10. Who at our church has the stamina follow-up requires? Is that fair to ask of any human without a system behind them?
11. If we could only fix one R this quarter, which one would move the most guests from visiting to returning?





The Three Phases

Before The Meeting

Sketch the three phases where everyone can see them before people arrive: Week 1, make them feel seen. Weeks 2 and 3, invite them deeper. Weeks 4 through 6, keep the door open.

The Win

Your team adopts the three-phase shape and drafts one real message for each phase before leaving.

The Big Idea

Somewhere around the words "six weeks of follow-up," a voice in your head asks: won't we be pestering people? Tyler says if that voice is talking, good. It means you care how this feels on the receiving end. So he hands you the test to carry through the rest of the book: "If a message wouldn't feel strange coming from a new friend, it isn't spam." A new friend texts you the afternoon after you spend time together. A new friend invites you to coffee a couple weeks in. Spam is constant frequency and irrelevant content. This plan is built like a friendship: "heaviest at the start, lighter as it goes, more personal the more they share."

Discussion Questions

Apply the new friend test to the last message our church sent a guest. Would it feel strange coming from a new friend? Would it feel like anything at all?

If the room is quiet: Read our last guest message out loud in the voice of a friend. Where exactly does it stop sounding like one?

Push further: What do we routinely send guests that we would never send a new friend? Why do we give ourselves that pass?

The phases follow a friendship: heaviest at the start, lighter as it goes. Our instinct is often the opposite: one big welcome and then silence, or a steady drip of announcements forever. Which wrong shape is our church closest to?

Each phase has a single job: earn the next visit. How does that change what we would write in a week-one text versus a week-five text?

If the room is quiet: What does a week-one message want from a guest? Now a week-five message?

Push further: Which of our current messages is trying to win all six weeks at once, and what would it look like broken into phases?

Phase 3 is the lightest in frequency but may carry the most weight because it proves faithfulness to people who are convinced churches just want warm bodies in seats. Who in your life proved themselves to you through quiet consistency? What did it change?

Remember the 5-D Theory from chapter 6. The guest who came because of a divorce is not healed in one week. How does six weeks of being pursued serve people the way one welcome email never could?

Before Next Sunday

What we will do?

Who owns it?

By when?

More Questions to Choose From

Swap any of these in, or use them for a second session on this chapter.

1. What is our honest reaction to sixteen touches over six weeks: excitement, skepticism, or fear? Where does the reaction come from?
2. The very first time someone attends, there is more than an 80 percent likelihood they never return. Does that number make week one feel more urgent or more hopeless? Why?
3. A guest who comes back a second time has doubled their odds of coming a third. What would our church do differently if we treated the second visit as the win?
4. Weeks two and three are when guests go quiet, not because they decided against you but because life is loud. What in our current follow-up survives a guest's busy week?
5. What is our one low-stakes Phase 2 invitation: a group, a lunch, a coffee? Is it actually low-stakes from the guest's side of the table?
6. Tyler says if you monitor nothing, send nothing: "If you can't watch the inbox, don't send the message." Could we keep that rule today?
7. Which phase does our current follow-up skip entirely, and what would it cost to add just that phase this quarter?
8. How would we handle a guest who starts attending regularly in week two? Does the plan feel different for them?
9. Describe the tone shift from "we're so glad you came" to "here's why we want you to come back." Can you hear the difference? Write one example of each.
10. What does patient, no-pressure contact communicate about God to a person who has been burned by a church before?





The Six-Week Plan

Before The Meeting

Bring the Boomerang Follow-Up Calendar from the book, your current welcome email if one exists, and blank cards for the drafting exercise. This session builds; protect time for it.

The Win

A drafted Parking Lot Text in your church's voice, and the six strategies sorted into now, next, and later.

The Big Idea

This is the chapter where the philosophy becomes a plan. Six strategies carry the six weeks.

The division of labor is the sentence to underline: "The system carries the schedule. People carry the impact." In a real first week, the system sends the Sunday text, the Monday email, and the Saturday text, while a person writes one three-sentence note. Five minutes of hands-on time per guest. And the chapter ends the weekly scramble for good: "A copy-and-paste plan exists, so you decide once and then quit deciding." Because a church that follows up the same faithful way every week is saying the thing a hit-or-miss church never can: "You can count on us."

Discussion Questions

Of the six strategies: text, email, gift, call, social media, and handwritten note, which do we already do, which have we never tried, and which one have we been avoiding? Why?

Draft our Parking Lot Text right now: their name, a real person's name, zero ask. Read the drafts out loud. Which one sounds most like a friend, and least like a church account?

If the room is quiet: Steal the book's sample and change three words so it sounds like us. Start there.

Push further: Now find the ask you snuck in and delete it. Everyone sneaks one in. What was ours?

The 66-day research reframes the whole timeline: guests are not making a decision; they are rebuilding a life pattern. How does that change how we feel about still showing up in week five?

"The system carries the schedule. People carry the impact." Sort our current follow-up tasks into those two buckets. What are humans doing that the system should carry? What has the system swallowed that needs a human?

If the room is quiet: List everything we currently do for guests, then label each item S for system or P for person.

Push further: Which human task on our list exists only because we lack a system, not because it actually needs a human?

The gift chapter says to skip the branded mug and prompt connection instead, like the mason jar of cookie ingredients that equipped Ali to love her neighbor. What could our church give that starts a connection instead of filling a cabinet

Before Next Sunday

What we will do?

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Who owns it?

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By when?

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More Questions to Choose From

Swap any of these in, or use them for a second session on this chapter.

1. Tim Schulte's church went from under 15 percent guest retention to nearly 55 percent with this plan. What would those numbers look like in real families at our size?
2. What does our church currently send in the first 24 hours? If the answer is nothing, what is the real obstacle: tools, ownership, or belief?
3. The Welcome Center gift turns a thank you into a reason to come back. What would we place at our Welcome Center, and who hands it over?
4. Nobody answers the phone anymore, and Tyler says call anyway, because "a thoughtful voicemail still goes a long way. It shows effort. And effort builds trust." Who on our team would actually enjoy making those calls?
5. When did you last receive a handwritten note? What did you do with it? What does that tell you about this strategy?
6. The plan asks for five minutes of hands-on time per guest in week one. How many guests do we average, and what does the real weekly workload come to?
7. Which of the six strategies best fits volunteers, and which needs a staff member or pastor? Sketch the assignments.
8. The sample follow-up email asks one easy question: "How was your experience?" What would we do with the honest answers if guests actually replied?
9. Every Monday, someone somewhere stares at a stack of cards and asks, "Okay, what do we send these folks?" Who is our version of that person, and what would deciding once do for them?
10. Look at the Boomerang Follow-Up Calendar in the book. What in the sixteen touches feels impossible for us today, and what feels surprisingly doable?





The 98 Percent

Before The Meeting

Before the meeting, find out what happens when someone texts your church's number back. Test it yourself. Bring the result, whatever it is.

The Win

Your first Pray message is drafted, and the team has confirmed what number guests can reply to, or admitted there isn't one.

The Big Idea

The channel that carries most of the plan is the text message. But Tyler is clear that raw stats are not a strategy: "A church that texts and a church that has a texting strategy are two very different things."

The strategy has parts: a local ten-digit number a guest can actually reply to, timing that lands when guards are down, because "The right words at the wrong time still miss," and four kinds of messages worth sending: Care, Inform, Pray, and Invite. Most churches only ever send one kind. When April Buske texted guests at her own church, "How can I be praying for you this week?", more than thirty people wrote back with real requests. And the craft rule underneath every message: "Write to one person, every time, even when the system sends it to a thousand."

Discussion Questions

Pull out your phones: what are the last three texts you responded to today, and how fast? Now compare that to how our church currently tries to reach guests. What are we learning?

Care, Inform, Pray, Invite: which of the four do we send today, and which have we literally never sent to a guest? What would our first Pray message say?

If the room is quiet: Which of the four types is our newsletter? Which type is a birthday card? Now categorize our last guest message.

Push further: Write the Pray message we have been afraid to send. What exactly is the fear, and whose is it?

April Buske's one-line prayer text got thirty real responses, and some guests asked how they could pray for her. What does that story tell us about what guests are actually waiting for?

"Write to one person, every time, even when the system sends it to a thousand." Take one announcement we recently sent and rewrite it to one imaginary guest by name. What changed?

If the room is quiet: Give the guest a name before you rewrite. Who is she?

Push further: Read both versions out loud. Which one would you personally answer, and within how long?

Does our church have a phone number guests can text? What do guests get back when they text in? What's working and what's not?

Before Next Sunday

What we will do?

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Who owns it?

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By when?

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More Questions to Choose From

Swap any of these in, or use them for a second session on this chapter.

1. Timing is strategy: Sunday afternoon and weekday evenings, when guards are down. When do our messages currently go out, and whose convenience is that schedule built around?
2. A message at exactly 9:00 a.m. looks like a machine; 9:13 a.m. looks like a person. What other small details separate human from automated in a guest's mind?
3. A short code reads as spam; a local number invites a reply. What number do our messages come from today, and what does it signal?
4. During Hurricane Ian, texts got through when nothing else did, and evacuated members were "just so glad to hear from their church." What crisis role could two-way texting play for us?
5. The book's test for follow-up emails: a plain note that looks like one person typed it beats the fancy template every time. What do our emails look like, honestly?
6. "Dear Valued Guest" kills a message. What phrases in our current communication sound like they were written for everyone, and therefore for no one?
7. Which door do we knock on beyond texting: email, calls, social? Kenan Klein's church improved retention by matching the channel to the moment. What is our channel map?
8. A guest replies to your text: "My wife just passed away, and I'm looking for a grief group." Who sees that message at our church, and how fast?
9. What would it take for our texts to feel like "We thought about you after Sunday" instead of an announcement with a name field?
10. Tyler says his own congregation-is-different skeptics still have phones within three feet all day. What is our version of "but our congregation is different," and does it survive contact with the data?





The System That Cares While You Sleep

Before The Meeting

Sketch your current follow-up process as boxes and arrows before the meeting, however ugly. You cannot circle exit points on a process nobody has drawn.

The Win

Your invisible exit points are circled on paper, and your first automation, a single same-day welcome text, is scoped with an owner.

The Big Idea

The most dangerous person in your follow-up process is the one doing it all alone. This chapter takes the objection head-on: automation feels impersonal. Tyler's answer starts with a birthday reminder: it is automated, and it lets you show up for people you love. "The automation didn't replace the relationship. It protected you from forgetting it." Then he flips the objection completely: "The truly impersonal thing was never the automated text. It's the silence that takes over when the busy week wins, and the guest never hears from anyone at all."

Discussion Questions

Before this chapter, what was your honest gut reaction to the word automation in ministry? Did the birthday reminder comparison move you? Why or why not?

Sit with the flipped objection: the truly impersonal thing is the silence when the busy week wins. Do you agree or disagree? Is this a reality for the guests at our church? What can we do about it?

If the room is quiet: How long has our automation debate been running, and how many guests visited while we had it?

Push further: Gently now: what are we afraid automation would say about us? Is any part of the resistance about protecting how we have always done it?

A woman felt wanted and noticed by a church for the first time in her life because of an automated text. What does that story say about the difference between how a message is sent and what it communicates?

"The system sends the same-day text. You show up when she texts back to say she's new in town and scared." Draw that line for our church: which parts of follow-up need a system's memory, and which need a person's presence?

Where does our follow-up depend entirely on one person remembering? Circle those points: the book calls them invisible exit points.

If the room is quiet: Start with one exit point: what happens the week the card-entry person is sick?

Push further: Which exit point has already cost us a family? How would we even know?

Before Next Sunday

What we will do?

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Who owns it?

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By when?

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More Questions to Choose From

Swap any of these in, or use them for a second session on this chapter.

1. Barna found 42 percent of pastors seriously considered quitting, with stress and loneliness leading the reasons. How could carrying less of the remembering protect the people leading our church?
2. What are the ideal times to reach a guest, and are those times when anyone on our staff wants to be at a desk? What does that mismatch prove?
3. Melanie Hill's church heard from guests within hours instead of days, and about half texted back, including a mom with terminal cancer looking for a church for her family. What replies might we be missing right now?
4. "Automation isn't about efficiency. It's about faithfulness." What is the difference between those two words in a ministry context?
5. What would our church do with the hours automation gives back? Answer specifically, not generally.
6. Tyler says nobody builds the whole system on a Saturday; you build one piece, watch it work, and add the next. What is our one piece?
7. The pastor at the beach panicked, then realized the system had sent the follow-up without him. What would that moment feel like for the person who currently carries our follow-up?
8. When someone replies "we'll be out of town for a funeral," the system stops and a human steps in. Does everyone on our team trust that this is how it works? What would build that trust?
9. Where does our follow-up depend entirely on one person remembering? Circle those points: the book calls them invisible exit points.
10. If technology could faithfully do the remembering, what would our people be freed to do that only people can do?





Build It Once. Run It Forever.

Before The Meeting

List every follow-up task you personally performed last month. The length of your list is the opening exhibit

The Win

One piece of follow-up is handed to a named person, with a walkthrough scheduled, and the midnight question has an honest answer on record.

The Big Idea

Imagine Sunday night. Guests visited this morning, maybe two, maybe twelve, and you are not worried about them, because by dinner every one of them received a personal text, and for six weeks the system will keep reaching out whether you are at your desk or at your kid's soccer game.

The chapter's dividing line: "A ministry runs on systems. A dependency runs on you." Then it asks the question worth sitting with: "If your church doubled in size at midnight tonight, would the systems you have in place today still work tomorrow?" The answer for most churches is no, and the way out is handing pieces away. "A system that runs entirely through you isn't really a system. It's a bottleneck with your name on it." And when you hand a piece to a volunteer, "You're not dropping the work. You're handing someone else the quiet joy of being the reason a guest came back."

Discussion Questions

Answer the midnight question honestly: if our church doubled in size tonight, which of our systems would still work tomorrow, and which would collapse by lunch? Does guest follow-up survive?

If the room is quiet: Take just Sunday morning: would parking, kids check-in, and guest follow-up survive doubling overnight?

Push further: Is our follow-up honestly a ministry, or a dependency with someone's name on it? Say the name kindly.

"A ministry runs on systems. A dependency runs on you." Where in our church have we built dependencies and called them ministries? Name names kindly, including your own.

Whose limits is our follow-up currently living inside? What happens to guests during the week that person is sick, on vacation, or out due to a crisis?

Handing off follow-up feels like lowering the bar, but the book says the system upholds the standard, not the person. What piece would each of us hand away first, and to whom? What is the quiet joy we would be giving them?

If the room is quiet: What is the smallest piece we could hand away: the notes? the gift drop-offs?

Push further: What would we have to write down for a volunteer to succeed at it on a Tuesday without calling anyone?

Tyler wants the finished feeling to be relief. What specifically would our team stop carrying if this system were running? Go around the room.

Before Next Sunday

What we will do?

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Who owns it?

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By when?

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More Questions to Choose From

Swap any of these in, or use them for a second session on this chapter.

1. In 2025, churches on these systems sent over 110 million texts and 22 million emails. Does scale like that encourage you or worry you? Why?
2. Kevin Ranfeld's manual system raised retention about 25 percent and ate the better part of a day every week. Would we rather have the manual win now or wait for the automated version? What does that reveal?
3. Pastor Marshall Clack's volunteers meant to call guests, then kids got sick and work blew up. Where do our volunteers' good intentions currently carry system-level weight?
4. The book suggests starting with the piece that drains you most. Which follow-up task drains our key people most, and who might genuinely enjoy it?
5. Gen Z and Millennial churchgoers are volunteering at significantly higher rates than older generations. Which younger person in our church could own a piece of this system?
6. What are our invisible exit points: every step where follow-up depends on someone remembering? List them on one page.
7. Create reminders, ask for help, pick and choose: the manual path works, but every manual step can fail. If we start manual, what is our honest plan for the week it breaks?
8. The chapter says empower the person who loves data entry, then "buy them coffee and compliment them all the time because these people are a rare breed." Who is our rare breed?
9. What would it mean for our senior leader to take a real week off and know no guest slipped through? Has that ever been possible here?
10. Every percentage point of retention represents real families, real kids in youth ministry, real couples in small groups. What would ten points mean here in faces, not numbers?





Know Your Number

Before The Meeting

Attempt to pull last quarter's guest list before the meeting. Bring whatever exists, even if it is embarrassing. Especially if it is embarrassing.

The Win

A tracking method is chosen, and someone owns pulling your starting-line number: of the last three months of first-time guests, how many came back.

The Big Idea

Of the first-time guests who visited in the last three months, how many came back? Not a guess. A number. Most leaders go quiet at that question, and Tyler says the silence is the whole problem: "You cannot improve what you refuse to measure, and you cannot feel the size of a leak you never look at." The one number that matters most is your first-time guest return rate. Nationally, it sits at 10 to 20 percent. Churches with a real system routinely pull it far higher, not because Sunday got better, but because Monday through Saturday finally started showing up.

Three more numbers sharpen the picture: how fast the first contact goes out, what percentage of guests reply, and how many take a named next step in six weeks. But the chapter refuses to let measurement become the mission: "The numbers don't shame you. They point you." A return rate is just a way of asking whether "the people who reached toward us" are "finding a hand reaching back."

Discussion Questions

The chapter opens with a test: how many of our first-time guests from the last three months came back? Does anyone in this room know? What does our silence or our certainty tell us?

If the room is quiet: Rough guess then: are we closer to one in ten coming back, or five in ten?

Push further: What would we do differently next week if that number hung on the office wall?

"You cannot improve what you refuse to measure." Why do we resist measuring the rate at which guests return? What obstacles are in the way of us measuring this?

Of the three supporting numbers, speed of first contact, reply rate, and next steps taken, which would expose our biggest weakness right now? What is our evidence?

Replay the volunteer-and-the-prayer-card moment: twelve cards to go before lunch, and one says "My daughter has stopped talking to me." What do we want every volunteer at our church to do in that moment, and have we ever actually told them?

If the room is quiet: Has a volunteer ever brought us something like that prayer card? What did we do with it?

Push further: What permission do our volunteers not know they have? How would we tell them?

Before Next Sunday

What we will do?

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Who owns it?

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By when?

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More Questions to Choose From

Swap any of these in, or use them for a second session on this chapter.

1. "The numbers don't shame you. They point you." What is the difference between a scoreboard culture and a pointing culture, and which one would our team naturally drift toward?
2. What is the simplest possible way we could start tracking return visits this month: a Google Sheet, the Saturday gift text, a Try 5 campaign? Pick one.
3. The book admits tracking second visits is genuinely hard and there is no perfect system yet. Does that honesty make you more or less willing to start imperfectly?
4. Speed is the most strongly correlated factor with a guest coming back, and the easiest to fix. How fast does our first contact go out today, and what would same-day require?
5. A low reply rate usually means messages sound like a brand instead of a person. If our reply rate is low or unknown, which of our messages would you rewrite first?
6. What named next step would we even count: a group, a class, a serving role? Do guests know those steps exist?
7. Tyler almost left this chapter out because for him the work was never about numbers, but "every point on that chart is a Faith, a Holly, a family like mine once was." How do we keep faces attached to our metrics?
8. The day tracking retention starts to feel like tracking inventory, the book says stop and reread chapter 7. What guardrail would keep our data conversations human?
9. Who should see our return rate regularly: staff only, the board, the whole hospitality team? What would each group do with it?
10. What would we celebrate first: the return rate moving up, or one specific family that came back? What does the answer say about us?
11. Write the question we want asked in every meeting where numbers appear: "What would make this person feel known, noticed, and loved right now?" Where should that question live so it never gets skipped?





When They Text Back

Before The Meeting

Bring your last ten guest replies, or the honest admission that there are none to bring. Plan time for the role-play in question two; it is the heart of this session.

The Win

A shared-inbox roster with a same-day commitment, and a grace-filled exit ramp drafted in your church's voice.

The Big Idea

Everything in the book funnels to one moment: the reply. "A reply means a stranger just decided you were safe enough to answer." The follow-up did its job.

Replies fall into three buckets your team can prepare for: the quick thank-you, which is an open door held slightly ajar; the logistics question, which usually signals someone planning to come back and quietly nervous about doing it wrong; and the disclosure, the one that stops you cold – a divorce, a diagnosis, a loss. Build a one-page playbook with one rule above the others: "A real person always answers a real person." Give volunteers permission not to know answers, because "Not knowing is fine. Disappearing is not." And the final word on urgency: "The only unforgivable response to a guest who reached out is silence."

Discussion Questions

When a guest texts our church back tonight at 9 p.m., where does that message actually go, and who sees it? If the answer is nobody, what did the guest just learn about us? What can we do about this?

If the room is quiet: Does our number even accept replies? Who has checked?

Push further: Who wakes up to that 9 p.m. message, and did they ever actually agree to that job?

Practice the three buckets out loud, and write starter scripts for our volunteers and team. One person plays the guest: a quick thanks, a logistics question, and then a disclosure like "my wife passed away last month, and I don't know why I came Sunday, but I did." How did we do? Where did we freeze?

If the room is quiet: Start with the easy one: answer "thanks, that's kind of you" out loud, right now.

Push further: Now the disclosure. What is your first sentence? Resist fixing anything. Just be a human being.

"A reply means a stranger just decided you were safe enough to answer." Have we been treating replies like ministry moments or like customer service tickets? What is one reply we mishandled or missed?

The shared inbox fixes the exhausted-pastor bottleneck: replies land where a whole team can see them, and the first person free responds. Who would be in our shared inbox, and what response speed will we commit to out loud?

Draft our exit ramp right now: the grace-filled message we send when someone says they are not interested. Read the book's version, then write ours. Why does how we leave matter as much as how we pursue?

Before Next Sunday

What we will do?

.....

Who owns it?

.....

By when?

.....

More Questions to Choose From

Swap any of these in, or use them for a second session on this chapter.

1. Nearly seven times more likely to connect within an hour. What does our current response time to guest replies actually look like: an hour, a day, or never?
2. A guest asking about parking or kids' check-in is usually planning to return and nervous about doing it wrong. How would we answer so the logistics answer also removes the fear?
3. "I'll meet you at the front doors and walk you to check-in myself" is the difference between information and ministry. What would that sentence sound like for our church's most common question?
4. What belongs in our one-page playbook: who watches, how fast we respond, starter lines for each reply type? Who writes the first draft this week?
5. How do we give volunteers real permission not to have the answer? Practice the handoff line: "That's a great question, and I want to get it right rather than guess."
6. A reply never pauses the automation; it adds a human conversation alongside it. Does that design make sense to everyone? What would happen if a regular attender kept getting the sequence?
7. Pull our last ten guest replies, or admit we cannot. What would drafting answers together as a team teach us faster than any training?
8. What is the difference between a clumsy but sincere answer and a perfect one that never comes? Which culture are we building?
9. Tyler writes that behind every reply is "a person deciding whether anyone here is safe." What makes a church feel safe to text? List concrete things.
10. The whole six weeks aims at one moment, and the moment aims at a life. Whose life at our church started with something as small as a reply? Tell the story if you know one.





Before Next Sunday & Your First Thirty Days

Before The Meeting

Bring calendars. This is the decision session; everything else was preparation. If your team text KIT to 816-482-3337 before the meeting, the templates will be in hand while you assign owners.

The Win

A path is chosen, build it or turn it on, every piece has an owner with a date, and a ninety-day review is on the calendar before anyone leaves.

The Big Idea

The closing chapters return to the guest you were asked to picture at the very start. Next Sunday, someone like them will walk into your church carrying something you cannot see. "Here's what's different now. This time, they won't disappear." Because you built something that will not let them. Follow-up was never administration: "It is the first act of ministry, the moment your church looks a stranger in the eye and says, 'You matter to us, and we are not going to let you slip away.'"

Your First Thirty Days gives your team the fork in the road, and the book is honest that "the system matters more than the software." Path one: build it yourself in four weeks, with an audit, a tracker, templates, and a handoff, remembering that on the manual road there are no weeks off. Path two: let Text In Church set up the entire six-week plan in about an hour. Two paths, one promise: no guest slips through the cracks. Either way, start before next Sunday turns into next year.

Discussion Questions

Go back to the guest each of us pictured at the start of this study. If they walked in next Sunday, walk through exactly what would happen to them now versus what would have happened before we started. What has actually changed, and what have we only talked about changing?

Two honest paths: build it ourselves in four weeks, or have the whole thing running in about an hour. Which path fits our team, our tools, and our track record with manual systems? Decide in this meeting.

If the room is quiet: What happened to the last manual system we built together? Tell that story first.

Push further: Which path would we still be running twelve months from now? Prove it from our own history, not our hopes.

Assign the pieces before anyone leaves: who owns the audit, who owns the tracker or the setup, who owns replies, and who owns the human touches? Names and dates, on paper.

If the room is quiet: Start with replies: who on this team genuinely likes people and their phone?

Push further: What date do we put on the review where these owners report back? Put it on the calendar before we pray.

The book calls follow-up "the first act of ministry." Six weeks from now, how will we know a guest at our church felt known, noticed, and loved? Describe the story we hope to be telling each other.

Before Next Sunday

What we will do?

.....

Who owns it?

.....

By when?

.....

More Questions to Choose From

Swap any of these in, or use them for a second session on this chapter.

1. "A follow-up system run at 70 percent isn't a 70 percent win. It's a guest slipping through a crack you promised to close." If we choose the manual path, are we prepared for every Friday, every week, with no weeks off? Who is signing up for that?
2. What is our starting-line number: of the first-time guests from the last three months, how many came back? Write it down, even if it stings, so we can watch it move.
3. Which week of the build-it-yourself path would our team realistically stall in: the audit, the tracker, the templates, or the handoff? What does that answer tell us about which path to choose?
4. Text KIT to 816-482-3337 as a team and look through the Boomerang Kit together. Which template or tool solves our biggest gap fastest?
5. The Four I's do not attack your plan; they attack the person carrying it. Who would our manual plan lean on, and how do we protect them?
6. What belongs on our church's version of the sixteen-touch calendar? Sketch week one together before this meeting ends.
7. What would we want to celebrate at a follow-up review ninety days from now? Set the date for that review right now.
8. Vacation, stomach flu, Easter: the book lists the weeks that kill manual systems. Which season on our calendar is most dangerous to a person-powered plan?
9. Who outside this room needs to hear what we decided tonight, and who is telling them this week?
10. If our church really believed no guest would ever slip through the cracks again, what would we pray for next?
11. One year from now, what story do we want to tell about the family that visited the week we finished this book?



Gather

As you work through Sessions 2 through 4, capture every gap and decision about how your church collects guest information: the seven minutes, the Welcome Talk, the connect card. This page becomes your Gather plan.

Gap or Decision	Owner	By When

Connect

As you work through Sessions 5 through 8, capture every decision about how your church personally reaches guests: your red balloon, your lobby owner, your response to the drift. This page becomes your Connect plan.

Gap or Decision	Owner	By When

Build

As you work through Sessions 9 through 17, capture every piece of the system itself: the plan, the messages, the automations, the owners, the numbers you will watch. This page becomes your Build plan.

Gap or Decision	Owner	By When

Now Build the Thing

You made it through the book and the questions. What comes next is the part your guests will actually feel.

The free Boomerang Kit includes every follow-up template in the book, the Guest Follow-Up Blueprint, and the printable Boomerang Calendar. Text KIT to 816-482-3337 to grab it.

When you are ready to go further: BoomerangBuilder.AI generates a six-week plan customized for your church in minutes, free at boomerangbuilder.ai. Text In Church is the platform that runs your six-week plan while you sleep; start the Boomerang Challenge free for 30 days at textinchurch.com/challenge. And First Impressions Academy is Ali's online coaching community for churches that want to keep getting better at guest care, at firstimpressions.church/academy.

Every guest who walks through your doors is looking for a place to belong. Throw it well. Trust the arc. And watch what comes back.



BOOMERANG