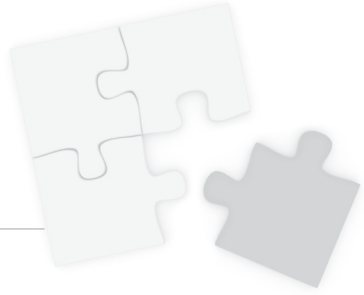


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Chapter 1



Hey, Peter, ever heard the one about the golfer and the funeral procession?”

Peter had just hit the ball—a beautiful, high-sweeping draw that landed in the middle of the fairway and ran for what seemed like days. Slapping high-five with one of his playing partners, Peter returned the club to his bag.

“No, I haven’t, Marcus. But I’m sure you’re going to tell me.” Marcus was always good for inserting humor into every conversation.

“So this guy walks to his ball on the green, which sits right next to a busy street,” Marcus said, clearly relishing his new joke. “He notices a long line of cars with their lights turned on and concludes it’s a funeral procession. Home-boy immediately takes his hat off, bows his head in a stunning display of reverence, and waits for the procession to pass by before he putts. Well, his partners are blown away by now, because this is not that kind of dude. You know what I’m saying? Finally, one of his homies says, ‘Man, all

these years of knowing you, I've never seen you show such respect, such honor. That touched me, man.' Putting his cap back on, he replies, 'We were married thirty-five years; that's the least I could do!'"

Marcus, Peter, and the two others in their foursome—Eddie and Thomas—laughed heartily. Someone from the group behind them coughed loudly, signaling that he thought Peter's group was taking too long to play. Picking up his bag and heading toward the golf cart, Peter said, "Marcus, that's why I love hanging out with you. No matter how stressed I may be, I always walk off the eighteenth fairway in a better mood. I don't know what I'd do without you and your silly jokes!"

Peter was glad he was spending time with Marcus and the guys today. It had been a busy week. To be sure, it had been a busy three years since he'd left Springdale Community to launch The Kainos Group, a consulting firm that helped existing churches transition into more multiethnic congregations. In that brief span of time Peter had built one of the most innovative firms in the church world. And his business was flourishing. A culture that longed for diversity, coupled with relatively few multiethnic churches across the ecclesiological landscape, put The Kainos Group squarely in the crosshairs of many pastors and leaders. If it had not been for his love of golf and these three golfing

buddies, Peter could have easily burned out.

“Hey, if you liked that joke, try this one!” Marcus continued. The laughter, fast fairways, and errant shots continued for the next several hours. Pulling up to the final green, Peter checked his phone and realized he had just missed a call, followed by a text message:

Give me a call as soon as you can. Pretty urgent.

Gary Kirkland.

Peter frowned. A call from Gary Kirkland was pretty rare these days, especially one followed by a text. He continued the camaraderie with the guys, but his mind was elsewhere.

Wonder what Gary wants?

When Eddie tapped in the last putt and they all shook hands, Peter made his split. “Gotta run, guys. I have some business to take care of.”

“What?” Eddie said. “Can’t it wait? What about the grill? We always hang at the grill after golfing.”

“No can do this time. Sorry. See you later!”

Peter walked to his car, dropped his golf bag in the trunk, and slid into the driver’s seat. Then he pulled out his phone and dialed Gary’s number.

“Let me guess. You were on the golf course,” Gary said,

with a chuckle in his voice, as soon as he answered.

“You know me so well.”

“Gotten better?”

“No. I feel like Sisyphus. Always pushing that rock up the hill. Just when I think my golf game has arrived, it goes downhill again. Got your call and your text. I’m guessing you weren’t checking on my handicap. What’s up?”

“Well, I’ve got some great and challenging stuff happening here at the church.”

“I wouldn’t expect anything less of you.”

“Thanks, Peter. We’re facing some pretty pressing decisions that will affect the trajectory of this church for years to come. They’re big enough that I need you to spend some time on the ground with us.”

Peter was pleasantly surprised by the invitation. Gary must be shaking things up at his church and needed back-up. “You know I’m here to help in any way I can. How soon are we talking?”

“Can you get here next week? I know it’s a lot to ask on such short notice.” Then as if to offer a reward, Gary said, “Maybe even bring your clubs?”

Peter laughed. “You’re speaking my love language. I’m there.”

As he hung up the phone, he felt a thrill run through him. His old colleague and mentor had turned to him for

help. Unaware of the exact challenges Gary faced, Peter was looking forward to some time with his friend and knew whatever the issue, Gary could count on Peter's support.