

**Reading Group Guide for**  
***Everything Is Just Beginning* by Erin Bartels**  
(*Spoiler alert*—these questions assume you've already read the book)

1. At the beginning of the story, Michael Sullivan sees the obstacles in his life far more clearly than the opportunities. The influence of the Wheeler family, especially Deb, helps him to slowly change his perspective. Do you tend to see challenges in a negative or positive light—as irritations and obstacles to your progress or interesting opportunities for growth? Are there people in your life who reinforce a negative outlook? What about people who encourage you to press on toward your goals? Which type of person do you think you are in the lives of others?
2. One of the primary themes in the book is creating to please an audience versus creating to please yourself. If you have a creative outlet in your life, which side of the pendulum do you occupy? Do you think creators have a responsibility to please their audience and/or fulfill their expectations? Why or why not? If you're a creator, how do you handle the expectations and criticisms of others?
3. Michael is very conscious (one might say self-conscious) of how others see him. Natalie does not share this hang-up and generally does things the way she wants to regardless of the judgments of others. Do you tend to worry about what others think of you—for instance, your appearance, your work performance, the state of your house, how your kids turned out? Why or why not? Has this been a constant in your life, or have you changed in one direction or another since you were a child or young adult?
4. In many ways, this story compares two different families: the Sullivans and the Wheelers. One family tends toward brokenness, dysfunction, neglect, and combativeness. The other tends toward wholeness, supportiveness, attention, and courtesy. Clearly the Wheeler family exhibits a healthier family dynamic than the Sullivan family. But what is something that the Sullivan family does very well? What is something the Wheeler family fails at? What was your family like growing up? What are things your family did well? What are things you could have done better?
5. Michael and Natalie are brought together by a mutual love of music, but they have different styles, different strengths, and, for much of the book, different dreams. If you are or have been married or in a long-term, committed relationship, what is it that brought you together as a couple? What different strengths do you bring to the relationship? Which of your differences have caused the most strife? How have you come together or compromised to make your relationship work?