



BOB GOFF

New York Times Bestselling Author of *Love Does*

EVERYBODY ALWAYS

BECOMING LOVE in a
WORLD FULL of SETBACKS
and DIFFICULT PEOPLE

FPC SUMMER BOOKCLUB

Study guide

Friends,

This short read is a collection of whimsical stories that show love in action. The writing is friendly, undemanding, often hilarious. The message is earnest and powerful. It struck me that the book itself, just as the love it describes, is like Jesus. Mild and challenging. Humble and huge. Affirming and convicting. So like our God. I hope you'll join me in discovering all that is possible when we love everybody always.

In Him,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Jim'. The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large loop at the beginning and a trailing flourish.

Jim



EVERYBODY ALWAYS SUMMER BOOK CLUB

LOVE PEOPLE WHERE YOU ARE
Session 1: Prologue and Chapters 1-3

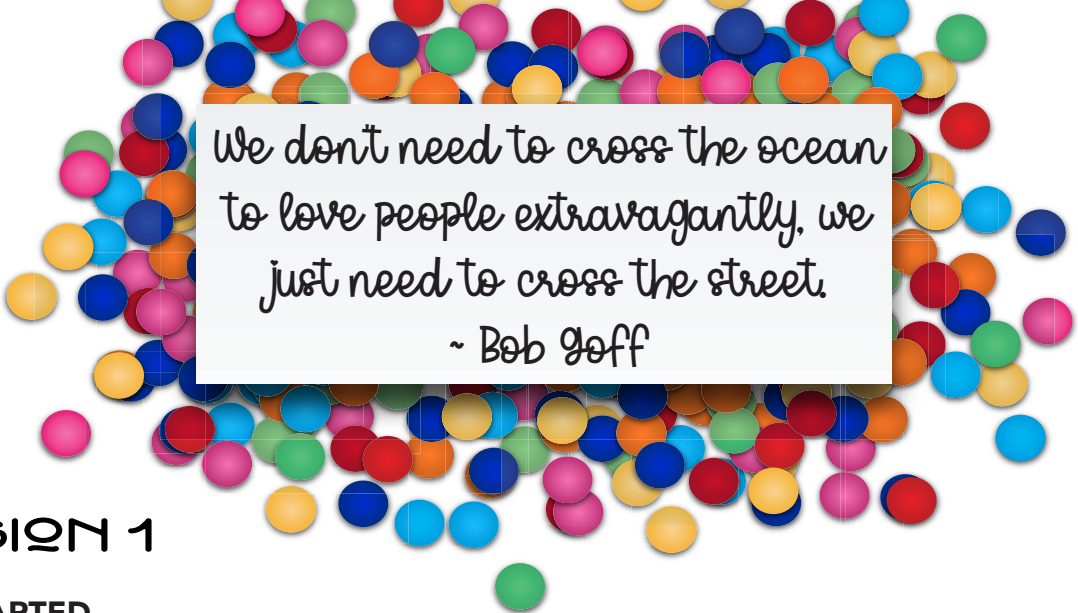
CATCH PEOPLE ON THE BOUNCE
Session 2: Chapters 4-8

DON'T PLAY IT SAFE
Session 3: Chapters 9-13

LOOK AT WHAT'S IN YOUR BUCKET
Session 4: Chapters 14-19

LOVE EVEN THE DIFFICULT PEOPLE
Session 5: Chapters 20-24

** this study guide was abbreviated from the Everybody, Always Study Guide written by Bob Goff*



*We don't need to cross the ocean
to love people extravagantly, we
just need to cross the street.
~ Bob Goff*

SESSION 1

GETTING STARTED

Have you ever heard of the musical *Wicked*? It was a big deal when it premiered in 2003, winning all the awards there were to win and making its stars household names. Why was it so popular? Well, aside from amazing songs and great performances, *Wicked* took the story of the *Wizard of Oz* and did something unexpected.

In *Wicked*, the familiar story of Dorothy, the Cowardly Lion, the Scarecrow, and the Tin Man is re-told from the perspective of Elphaba, the Wicked Witch of the West. In this telling, we learn about Elphaba's sad backstory, the rivalry with her sister (Glinda the Good Witch), and how she might not be the one-dimensional villain we always thought she was. This musical presents us with an Elphaba who is a traffic figure and whom, we discover, is more misunderstood than mean. It also shows us that when you learn someone's story, it can totally change how you see that person.

In our culture these days, it's tempting to sift everybody we meet into two categories: "good guys" and "bad guys." It is as if life is one of those old vaudeville melodramas where we cheer for the hero and hiss at the villain. But that's not real life, is it? Real life is way more interesting than that. Everybody we know is a fully formed, complex, and interesting creation. Nobody in our orbit is all good or all bad. Learning people's stories helps us see this. It breaks down our judgments and pre-conceived notions. It frees us from viewing others as cardboard cutouts but instead as the actual, real, God-created people they are. And, like Elphaba, learning someone's story might help us see them in a different light.

When you get caught up in a life of following Jesus, the old categories of "good guys" and "bad guys" stop working for you. You realize that not only does everybody have a story, but also that God wants us to love them too: no matter what. Yes, this can be kind of scary, but that's why we learn people's stories. It makes the creepy people God wants us to love a lot less scary and frees us to actually reach out to them right where they are.

All this is what we're talking about this week in our first session of *Everybody, Always*. We're going to share some stories, learn to reach out to our neighbors, and figure out how to actually love everybody God has already put in our lives ... always.

HEARING THE WORD

Read Luke 10:25-37

At the end of this parable, Jesus asks the teacher of the law which of the three people who passed the half-dead man on the road was a “neighbor” to him (see verse 36). Why does Jesus ask this question? Why do you think the expert in the law answers the way he does?

Have you ever seen someone give away extravagant love to a person who was their enemy? If so, when was it and what did it look like?

Read Matthew 18:1-5

What do you think Jesus meant when he talked about becoming like little children?

Where are you frustrated by your own need right now?

In what ways might this actually be an invitation into the Kingdom of God?

DOING THE WORD

For this activity, each participant will need a copy of the grid on the following page and a pen or pencil.

Loving your neighbor is something that can start with the people God has put around you in your world. It doesn't require going across the ocean—just across the street.

With this in mind, look at the grid below. This grid represents your neighborhood. The center square with the word "YOU" in it stands for where you live. The empty squares around it represent where your neighbors live.

Take a moment to visualize your neighborhood. Now, see how many of those empty squares you can fill with the actual names of the people who live there. Just do your best. If you live next to the ocean or in the middle of nowhere, just use your office or some other public space where you spend time as your starting place.

It's okay. Just fill in as many names as you can.

	YOU	

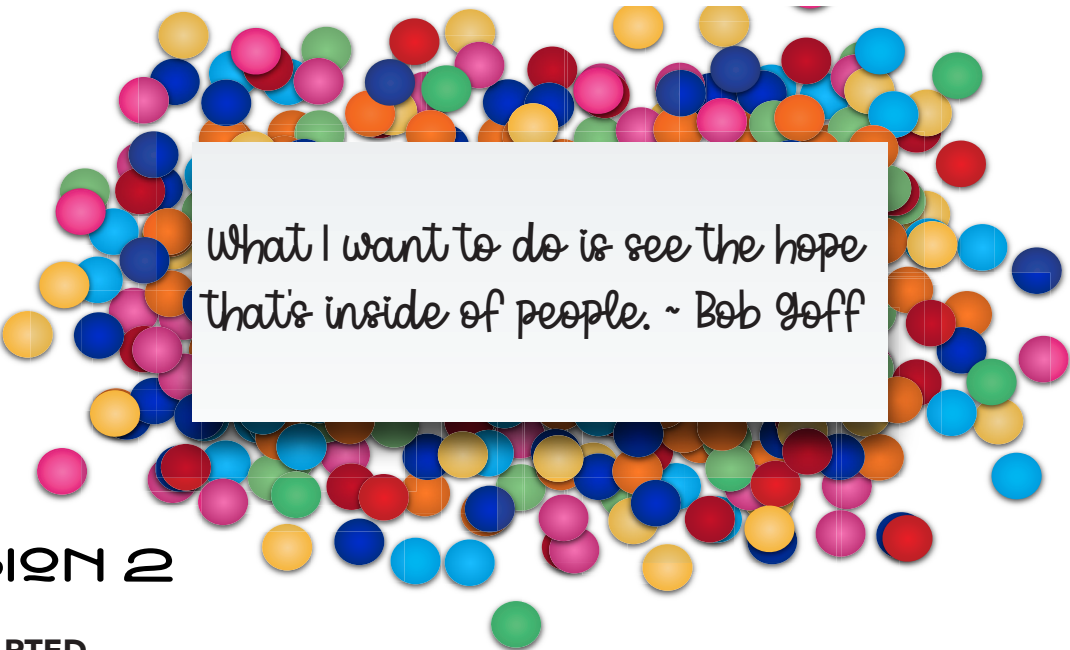
Look at your grid once it's filled in. What do you notice? Are there any trends? Who do you know well? Who do you not know at all?

Next, circle the neighbor on your grid whom you know the least and with whom you want to make a better connection this week. It might be someone you know a little, and you can invite that person to coffee to get to know better. Or it could be a person you don't know at all, and your goal for this week is just to learn his or her name. Whatever it is, take a second, say a prayer, and make your plan.

When you're done, share with the group your plan for connecting with a neighbor this week. If anyone in the group is stumped, offer some suggestions. And remember, the goal here is not to convert anyone, or witness, or anything like that. The goal is just to connect ... because that's where it all starts.

CLOSING PRAYER

Close the meeting by praying for the specific person you are going to try to meet this week. Pray especially that God would give you the courage to follow through!



What I want to do is see the hope
that's inside of people. ~ Bob Goff

SESSION 2

GETTING STARTED

One of the most popular TED talks of all time is called “The Power of Vulnerability.” It is a talk by Dr. Brené Brown, a research professor who studies empathy and vulnerability.

Dr. Brown has found that empathy and shame are like the opposite ends of an old radio dial. (Remember those?) She says that the way a person moves the tuner on the dial toward either empathy or shame is, in fact, all about how vulnerable that person is willing to be.

For instance, if you turn vulnerability all the way up, you will tune in the “empathy station.” On this station, through your sharing of experience, you will find connection with another person. However, if you turn vulnerability all the way down, you will end up tuned in to the “shame station,” which just shuts everything down.

Processing the kind of vulnerability that makes empathy happen is difficult, because you have to open yourself up to other peoples’ experiences. You have to be willing to see the world through their eyes and imagine what it’s like to stand in their shoes. This costs you something.

However, shame is what happens in the absence of vulnerability. Shame occurs when, because you’ve been hurt by others in the past, you armor-up, vowing, “That’s never going to happen to me again!” As a result, shame produces fear, suspicion, and isolation. So, empathy connects you with other people, while shame drives you further apart.

This week, you will be invited to consider these categories of empathy and shame when it comes to loving the people in your orbit that you might find a “little creepy.” Instead of judging them, you will be asked to consider where they’ve come from and what they’ve been through.

Doing this will keep love flowing, and it will put you in the position where you are open to “catching people on the bounce.”

REFLECT: STOP KEEPING SCORE

Last week, you were invited to act. Did you meet with one of your neighbors during the week? If so, how did it go? What did you learn about yourself?

Is there anyone in your life who you've "broken rhythm" with? In other words, is there someone you once loved very much who you have lost contact with because of a disagreement or misunderstanding?

HEARING THE WORD

Read Matthew 16:13-2

When Jesus calls Peter the rock on which he will "build his church," do you think he is rewarding Peter for his answer or naming something about Peter that is already true? Explain.

Why do you think Jesus instructs the disciples not to tell anyone he is the Messiah?

Read Luke 15:11-32

In what ways can you relate to the "score keeping" nature of the older brother?

In what ways has God shown you mercy like he did to the younger brother?

How do you respond to the idea that God doesn't feel the need to divide things equally to "keep everything fair"?

How does this parable challenge you to change your mindset toward others?

Do you think the older brother ever joined the party? More importantly, what would you do if you were in his place?

READ: CATCH PEOPLE ON THE BOUNCE

Now that you've read chapters 4-8 in *Everybody, Always*, reflect on these questions:

Does your Christian practice feel more like "faith" or "compliance" these days? Explain.

Is there a relationship where you've let shame create a barrier between you and someone else? What would it look like to heal that divide?

What does it mean to build a "kingdom" rather than a "castle" when it comes to accepting others who are different from you?

What are some ways to love the difficult people in your life "thirty seconds at a time"?

Why is it so important to react to those who have failed—or who have fallen short of the standards you or society has placed on them—with compassion and understanding instead of disapproval or indifference?

What would it look like if we chose to spend one week loving the people around us without an agenda?

DOING THE WORD

This week, pick three people in your life who represent rings of familiarity on your tree. Start with someone in your “inner” ring who is close to you, like a family member or friends. Next, pick someone who is three things or so out from that place, such as an acquaintance or someone you meet up with on occasion. Finally, pick someone who is four or five rings out from that spot. This could be a person who is distant from you because you don’t know him or her well, or because you’re critical of the person, or even because he or she is your enemy.

Once you’ve settled on your three people, write their names in the space provided on the next page. Next, write down three kind, friendly, complimentary statements you are going to make about them behind their backs. You can say these statements to your coworkers, friends, people at church, or anyone else who is at least familiar with the person. Just make sure that you actually say these things to someone in your world during the week.

Person #1: _____

Three statements you will make about this individual:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

Person #2: _____

Three statements you will make about this individual:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

Person #3: _____

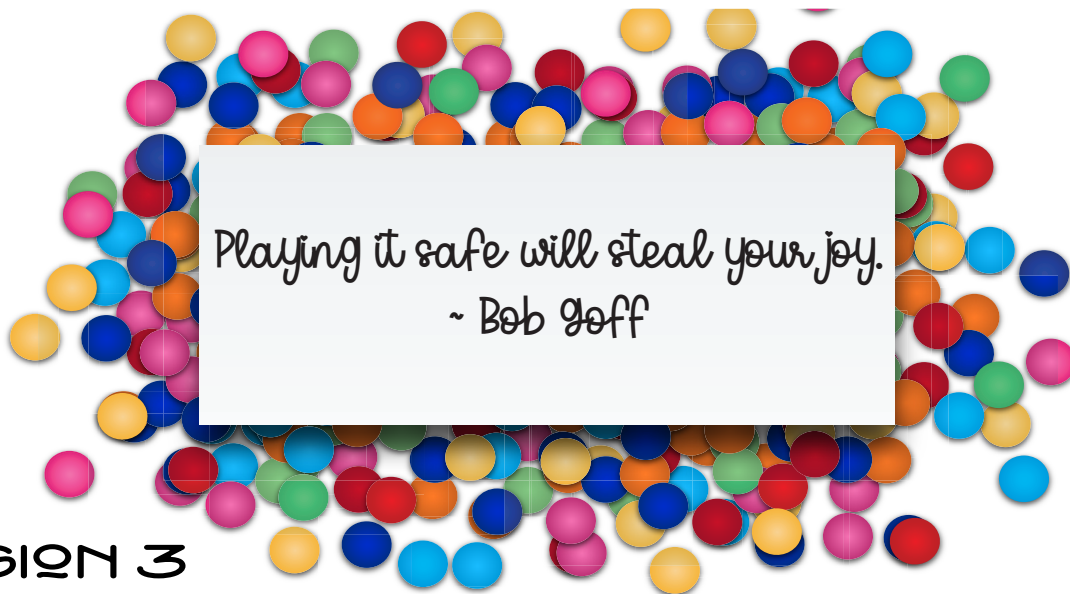
Three statements you will make about this individual:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

Once you’ve practiced some good gossip, see how it feels. What was it like? Did it change anything about how you saw the person? Did it change anything about how you saw yourself? Keep track of your thoughts, make some notes below, and share them next week.

CLOSING PRAYER

Father, I pray that this week we would practice “good gossip” on behalf of those around us. Help us to spread good, kind thoughts as we go through our days. May the words of our mouths, and the meditations of our hearts be glorifying to you, our Redeemer. Amen.



SESSION 3

GETTING STARTED

Jesus used to really irritate the religious people of his day. They were always getting mad at something he said or did, especially when it came to the poor. One time, some of these folks were questioning Jesus' authority. They thought Jesus didn't have the right to say all the stuff he was saying.

Jesus responded by telling a story (as he often did), and then ended with this statement to the religious elite: "Truly I tell you, the tax collectors and the prostitutes are entering the kingdom of God ahead of you" (Matthew 21:31). As you can imagine, that really got under their skin! But why would he say this? Tax collectors and prostitutes were the immoral folks nobody liked. They had blown it and nose-dived in their choices in all the ways those moral religious people hadn't. How could these failures-at-life be plugging into God's word first?

Well, according to Jesus, it was precisely the fact they had failed that made the difference. One of the things that gets in the way of us connecting with God is our self-sufficiency. Even if we follow all the rules, do all the right stuff, and pray all the right ways, we can still miss God if we're doing it by our own strength. This is because we are most open to God when we are needy, busted, and broken. No one knows why it's that way, but that's how it is. It's in our failures that we most easily find God, not in our great achievements.

This is why Jesus said the prostitutes and tax collectors were entering God's kingdom ahead of the "proper" religious folks. They knew all too well what it was like to be broken and needy. Society didn't work for them, and they had been pushed to the edges and looked down on because of it. However, in the great mystery of the gospel, that marginalization is exactly what opened them up to finding grace. And find it they did!

This upside-down dynamic is what this session is all about. It's about getting real enough regarding our own failures to meet the God who wants nothing more than to lavish his grace on us. Yes, this can be scary. And yes, it's a risk. But God can't lavish his grace on us if we don't think we have any needs.

So, what about it? Are you ready for grace? If so, get ready to get real about it all as we jump into this week's teaching.

REFLECT: STOP KEEPING SCORE

What is something in your life that you've failed at?

What did you learn from the experience?

Last week, you were invited to act in the in-between. Did you "talk about the right stuff" concerning the three individuals you identified? How did it go? What did you learn about yourself and about God by engaging in these activities?

HEARING THE WORD

Read Matthew 6:1-4

Why do you think announcing "your righteousness in front of others" is hypocritical?

What kind of reward is Jesus talking about in verse 4?

Read John 9: 1-11

How do you respond to this scene? In what ways have you seen people today asking the same questions as the disciples?

Where are you feeling the most tempted to look backward and ascribe blame for the hard things in your life? Why?

When was a time when something good emerged out of a sad and tragic circumstance?

Do you think this kind of thing could happen for you again? Why or why not?

Think about your answers to the questions above. Can Jesus ascribe a different purpose and meaning to those times?

READ: DON'T PLAY IT SAFE

Now that you have read chapters 9-13 in *Everybody, Always*, reflect on the following questions:

Have you ever tried to “fake” your faith? Why?

Where do you find your true identity?

Why is it important to not always be looking for the “green lights” when it comes to boldly stepping out in faith and loving others?

When you think about the word evangelism, does it bring up positive or negative associations? Why did you answer the way you did?

Jesus invites us to move from merely identifying with someone’s pain to standing with that person in it. What is the difference between the two? Where is a place in your life that you have an opportunity to “stand in” someone’s pain with him or her?

DOING THE WORD

For this activity, each participant will need an index card and a pen or pencil.

For the remainder of this session, you and your group will spend time sharing real stuff and getting honest about your mistakes. It's at this place that we meet God and community happens. Start by grabbing an index card and a pen or pencil.

On the index card, write down a mistake you have made that you fear you might be "over-identifying" with. These are the kinds of mistakes that can keep you from jumping toward the life that God has for you—the ones that make you want to stop trying and play it safe by never putting yourself out there again. Be honest. No one is going to read the card but you.

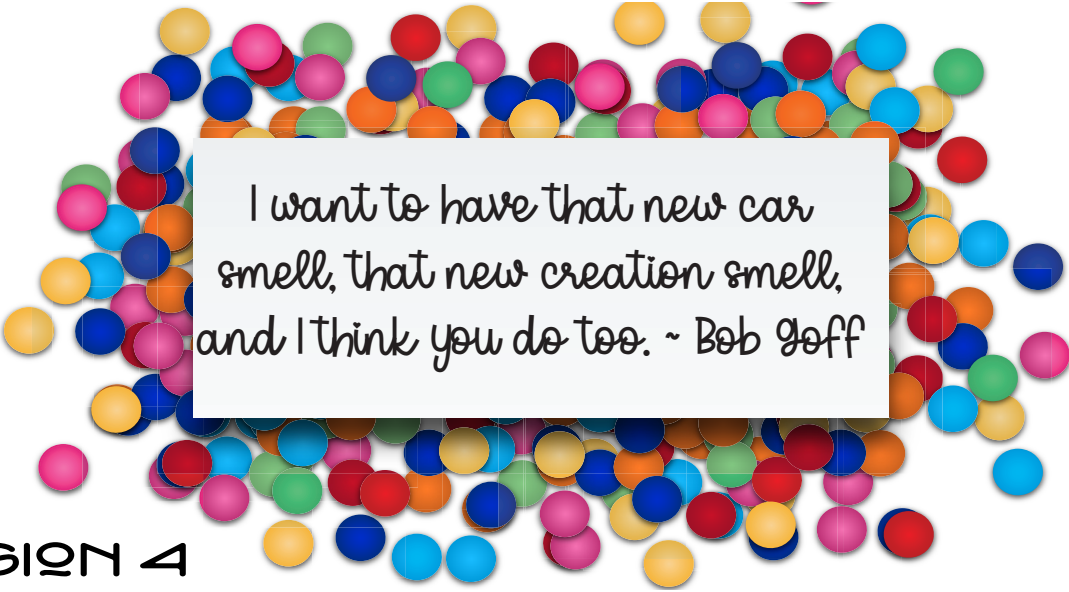
Once everyone in the group has written something down, take the index card you've written and ball it up in your hand. Stand with the group in a circle, and then take two steps back (to make sure everybody has some space). Once everyone is in position, reflect on the trouble this mistake has caused you and the way you realize it has held you. Next, consider if you would like for things to be different.

As everyone in the group is thinking about this, take a jump forward as a way of saying yes to God's invitation of a new life! The jump doesn't have to be big (actually, it shouldn't be—be careful!), and it can also be a step forward if you can't jump or don't have room. Likewise, if you're seated and can't stand, feel free to move a foot or finger forward.

Basically, whatever action you take, make it symbolize your desire to jump toward the new life God has for you and stop playing it safe.

CLOSING PRAYER

As you and the group members stand together in the circle, close by having one person read the words of Psalm 23:1-4 as a prayer and promise from God. Say "amen" together and call it a night.



I want to have that new car
smell, that new creation smell,
and I think you do too. ~ Bob Goff

SESSION 4

GETTING STARTED

In Jesus' day, eating with people was a big deal. This is because if you ate with someone, it meant that you were interested in being friends with him or her. It meant you accepted that person, and it was a sign to everyone else in the community about what mattered to you.

Based on this, you'd think that Jesus would have picked all the morally upright, virtuous people to eat with. After all, these were the folks who had been "getting it right" and showing everybody else how it was done. It only makes sense that Jesus would want to point them out by having lunch, right?

Well, you'd be surprised. Or maybe you wouldn't.

Instead of always eating with the rule-following religious people, Jesus often ate with the wrong kinds of people. The people who had blown it. The people who were not respected. The people who were seen as the worst examples of godly living. And here's the thing ... it drove the religious people nuts.

One time, when these folks asked Jesus about why he did this, Jesus replied, "It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance" (Luke 5:31-32).

Of course, Jesus knew that what opens people up to an authentic relationship with God is their need. If this sounds familiar (as in, didn't the last session open with the same lesson?), you'd be right. It is a major theme in Jesus' ministry. But here's where this lesson diverges from the last one: opening up to God is not just about recognizing your own need but also about moving toward other needy people.

Even the ones you may find a bit creepy.

Here's the thing: if you hang around needy people, you'll find Jesus. No doubt. So the question for this week is, "Do you want to meet Jesus?"

This session shows how it works.

REFLECT

Who was your best friend growing up? Are you still in touch? If not, why do you think the two of you drifted apart?

Did you participate in the Move Toward Others activity last week? If so, how did it go?

What did you learn about God and/or about yourself?

HEARING THE WORD

Read John 17:20-23

What do you think Jesus has in mind when he prays that all his disciples would be "one"?

Jesus says the unity of his disciples is what will tell the world that he was sent from God (see verse 23). Is the church of today known for its unity? If so, where do you see it? If not, why not?

Read Matthew 25:31-46

What questions does this parable of Jesus bring up for you?

What are some of the ways that people show love to you? How do you express care to others?

Are there other opportunities for connecting with the needy that God might be calling you to do as well?

READ: DO MORE STUFF

Now that you've read chapters 14-19, reflect on the following questions:

What was a time when you saw God leading you away from the safest route to the one that helped you grow the most? Do you think taking that risk resulted in growth? Why or why not?

How would it change your life if you viewed every person you met as Jesus?

What is Jesus' ultimate "plan" for us when it comes to serving others?

What do you think Jesus meant when he said that if we make a big deal about what we're doing now—hoping someone will clap—we've already gotten our reward?

What has helping others taught you personally about the cost of grace?

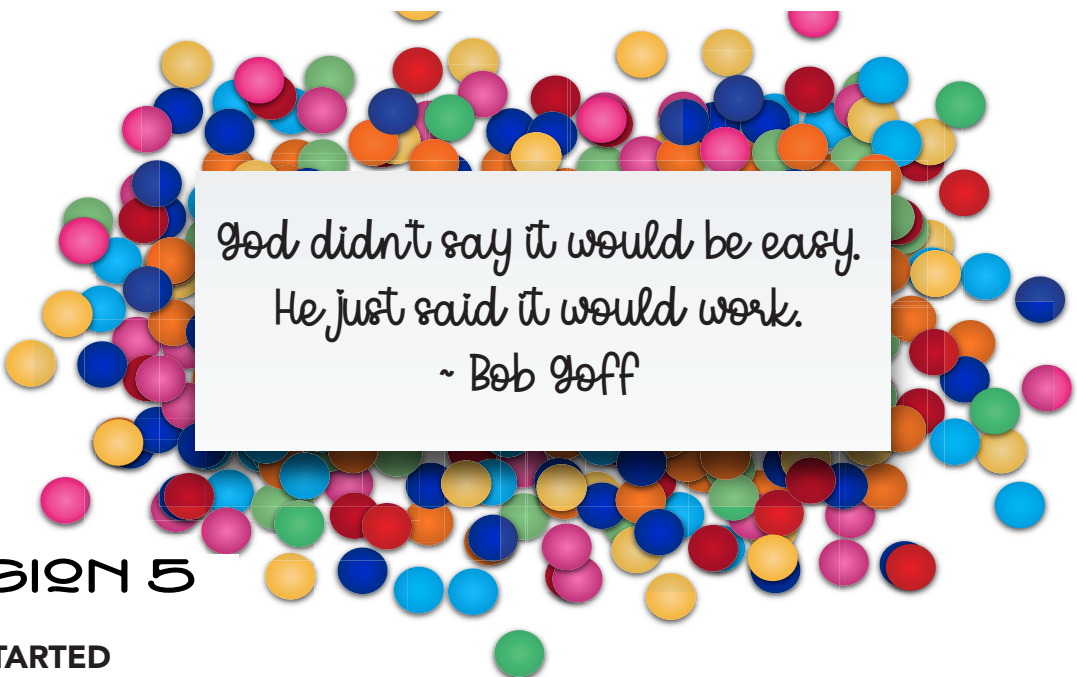
DOING THE WORD: BE AVAILABLE

For this activity, simply spend the rest of the week picking up your phone every time it rings. Maybe not for a telemarketer, but for every call with a phone number you recognize! This might seem crazy, but see what God does with it. And if that's too much trouble, then at least try it for a day or even an afternoon. Just take one step toward being available, and see how Jesus meets you there.

Oh ... and if you don't have a mobile phone, it doesn't mean you get out of this. Do other things to be available, like work with your door open in the office, or eat in the breakroom, or go where people are asking for money on the street and get in a conversation with them. Whatever you choose to do, make note of it below, bring your experiences to share with the group at the next session—and don't forget to take your bucket along.

CLOSING PRAYER

Close the meeting by praying that God would help you "fill your bucket" with the right things. Ask that he would fill your life with his plans so you can become more like him.



God didn't say it would be easy.
He just said it would work.
~ Bob Goff

SESSION 5

GETTING STARTED

So, what does this all mean for us? This is the big question we're asking in this final session. During the last four sessions, we've discussed how loving Jesus doesn't mean we have to cross the ocean, we just have to cross the street. We've seen that the people who creep us out the most are also our neighbors—and loving them means learning their stories. We've learned that doing this kind of thing can be risky, but that in Jesus we can actually become people who take the risk.

All this means there's yet one more step for us to take: we have to actually do it. There's a difference between learning about how to do something and actually taking a step to do it. The plan for this final session is to get you thinking about how you are going to love everybody, always. As we will see, this includes your friends, family, and acquaintances, but is also includes the difficult people you don't normally get along with—who might be called your "enemies."

You've been training for this. All the in-between sessions activities have been designed to grow your imagination and stretch your comfort zone so you can make your own plan for what comes next. So take a deep breath, say a prayer, and jump into this session.

And don't worry. If you blow it a time or two, remember that God will always be there to catch you on the bounce.

REFLECT

How do you respond to this idea of taking steps to love the difficult people in your life?

What are some challenges that you think you will have in doing this?

What did you learn about God? What did you learn about yourself last week?

HEARING THE WORD

Read Matthew 5:43-48

What is one practical way you've seen someone love his or her enemy?

Since the gospel is about people who make mistakes and find God in their failure, what do you think Jesus means when he tells his disciples to "be perfect"?

Read 2 Corinthians 2:5-11

What strikes you about Paul's words to the church in this passage?

Are you currently carrying a grudge about something that happened to a loved one? What is it?

What would need to happen for you to be able to forgive the offender and let it go?

What would you need from God to make that possible?

READ

Now that you've read chapters 20-24 in *Everybody, Always*, reflect on the following questions:

What are some situations you are facing right now where you need to hear God say, "Be not afraid"? What would it take for you to be courageous in that situation?

When are some times that God "blew your mind" and used unbelievable things to help you experience his power?

Every day, we get to decide whether we're really following Jesus or treating him like "he's just a Sherpa carrying our stuff." What is the difference between the two?

When you think about your life, do you tend to look at how far you have to go or see how far you've come? Why do you think you answered like you did?

How have you seen your life change as you've learned to love difficult people? How have you seen your loving actions change another person's life?

DOING THE WORD

For this activity, each participant will need one sheet of paper and a pen or pencil.

For the past four weeks, you have engaged in the *Everybody, Always* study through group discussion and a practical activity designed to help you learn to love everybody, always. These activities have been provided for you ... until now! This week, it's your turn.

On the sheet of paper, list one or two people who you've lost touch with ... this may be as simple as a college roommate you haven't spoken to in several years or it may be someone you desire to be reconciled with after a disagreement or falling out.

After you make your list, spend a few minutes brainstorming ways you can connect with these people. This could be via social media, email, phone or a mutual friend. Next pick one person and finalize a plan for reaching out to them in the week ahead.

Once your list is complete, share your ideas with your group. Tell them who you're going to approach and how you will do this. The group may be helpful in planning your strategy, especially if you are approaching someone with whom you need to reconcile past hurts or misunderstandings.

If you're stuck and don't know how to move toward this goal, here's a place to start.

In the book of Romans, Paul says you should "bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse" (12:14). One way to live out this teaching is to call to mind one of the people on the list you made during the group time—the one you find the hardest of all to love. Then, while you're holding that person in your thoughts, ask that God would bless him or her.

That's it. It's that simple. Except that when you try it, you will probably find that it's not! Offering a prayer of blessing for someone who has hurt you or done wrong to you can feel really weird. But that's because God is using it to grow you and set you free.

Now, you are not blessing people who are out to get you so that they'll have some sort of divine encounter with God (though that would be cool, wouldn't it?). Instead, you are blessing them so you can be released from the stuff that clogs your heart—things like hate, bitterness, and resentment. You bless them because it's good for both parties and if the opportunity arises for the two of you to reconcile, you'll be ready.

So, go forth and bless their hearts...in the name of Jesus.

CLOSING PRAYER

Close your time by praying that God would give you the courage to not just agree with Jesus but actually go out and do what he says. Then pray that God would help you to not allow fear to hold you back in truly loving everybody, always.

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FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

820 colonial avenue

Norfolk, VA 23507

www.fpcnorfolk.org