

STUDY GUIDE

FIVE SESSIONS

BOB GOFF

New York Times Bestselling Author of *Love Does*



EVERYBODY ALWAYS

BECOMING LOVE *in a*
WORLD FULL *of* SETBACKS
and DIFFICULT PEOPLE

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S T U D Y G U I D E



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Everybody, Always Study Guide

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INTRODUCTION

“Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind”; and, “Love your neighbor as yourself.”

LUKE 10:27

Welcome to *Everybody, Always!*

It’s good that you’re here. Like, really good. Because the world we’re living in right now is really good at something else: division. It is great at teaching us to only trust people who talk like us, think like us, vote like us, live where we do, and see everything like we do. And it also teaches us that anybody who talks, thinks, votes, worships, or sees the world differently than us can’t be trusted. They may even be our enemy. This way of seeing the world makes love pretty conditional—with the condition being, *we only have to love people who are just like us.*

The good news is that God isn’t like that. Not even close. God’s love is unconditional, and it’s for everybody. God’s love turns enemies into friends, and it is bigger than all the things we cook up to divide ourselves. But God doesn’t want to be the only one around here who loves this way. He wants *us* to love this way too. You see, God doesn’t want us to love some people, sometimes. He wants us to love everybody, always.

Everybody? Yes, everybody. The people we like and the people we don’t? Yes. The people we respect and the people who creep us

out? Exactly. The people we admire and the people we don't? Them too. Everybody actually means *everybody*.

Well, what about *always*? Does that mean, literally, always? Yes, it does. As in, when we feel like it and when we don't? Yep. When it's easy and when it's hard? Bingo. When it gives us energy and when it wears us out? Precisely. For God, always really means *always*.

Now, if this sounds like a tall order, you're right. But you're also in luck. God does not leave us to love this way by trusting in our own willpower. The Holy Spirit is around to actually help us love this way. But there's another part too: this is something we can actually train in to get better. Like running a marathon or practicing an instrument, love is something we learn and grow in as we practice. And that's where a study like this comes in really handy.

Everybody, Always is a five-week experiment in learning how to love everybody, always like God does. Each session will explore a different aspect of this love through the teachings and stories of Bob Goff. There will be an opening question, a little Bible reading, and then you'll watch Bob on the video.

However, the real action comes after the video, when you dig in to each topic in a guided small group time. Here we let the rubber meet the road and see how loving everybody, always, gets practical. It's going to be great. Really. However, if you want to get the most out of your *Everybody, Always* experience, it's best to keep a couple of things in mind.

First, the real growth in this study will happen during your small-group time. This is where you will process the content of Bob's message, ask questions, and learn from others as you listen to what God's love is doing in their lives.

Which bring us to point two: small groups can be a deeply rewarding time of intimacy and friendship, but they can also be a disaster. Work to make your group a "safe place." That means first being honest about your thoughts and feelings as well as listening carefully to everyone else's.

Third, resist the temptation to “fix” a problem someone might be having or to correct someone’s theology. That’s not what this time is for. And finally, keep everything your group shares confidential. All this will foster a rewarding sense of community in your *Everybody, Always* group and give God’s Spirit some space to heal, challenge, and empower you to love without conditions.

HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

As you'll discover throughout this study, love is practical. It gets out there and does things. It takes risks. This study is designed to give you similar opportunities.

Each session in *Everybody, Always* begins with a mixer question followed by a reflection from the Bible. Then you'll watch the video teaching with Bob and jump into some directed small-group discussion. Even though there are lots of questions available for your small group, don't feel like you have to use them all. Your leader will focus on the ones that resonate with your group and guide you from there.

The final component of each session is called "Doing the Word." This is where *Everybody, Always* might diverge from studies you have done before, as your group will engage in one hands-on, practical exercise that makes the content Bob described in the video come alive. These exercises are designed to be completed during your meeting, and they will be what you make of them. If you choose to only go through the motions or abstain from participating in these exercises, there is a lot less chance you'll find what you're looking for during this time. But if you give it a go and take the gamble, you may discover what so many others have already found to be true: *faith comes alive when we take holy risks for God.*

Now, the thought of "risky" activities can make some folks feel anxious. That's okay. If you fall into this category, just read ahead to each "Doing the Word" activity, and you can see what you're going to be invited to try. Then you can prepare yourself accordingly.

And remember, none of these experiments involve anything weird or embarrassing. They are just hands-on opportunities to learn to love like Jesus does.

At the end of each session, there are two or three more opportunities for you to engage the content of *Everybody, Always* during the week. This section includes activities developed around action (called *Do*), Bible reflection (called *Reflect*), and/or reading a short chapter from *Everybody, Always* (called *Read*). The challenge will be to do at least one of these activities between sessions and to use this study guide to record what you learned.

Starting in session two, there will be time before the video teaching to check in about the previous week's activity and process your experiences as a group. If you could not do an experiment one week or are just joining the study, don't worry. Hearing what others have learned will be nourishment enough on its own.

Finally, remember that all this is an opportunity to train yourself in a new way of thinking about love. The videos, discussions, and activities are all meant to kick start your imagination so you start coming up with new ideas and trying things on your own. I mean, what do you think God could do with a whole group of people who were passionate about Jesus' love and eager to put it into creative practice? Let's jump into *Everybody, Always* and find out.

Note: If you are a group leader, there are additional instructions and resources in the back of this guide for leading the activities and discussion times. Because some of the activities require materials and setup, make sure you read this over ahead of time so you will be prepared for each week's activity.

SESSION ONE

LOVE PEOPLE WHERE YOU ARE

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

B O B G O F F

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 retold 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 tragic 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 preconceived 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.

CHECKING IN

Welcome to the first session of *Everybody, Always*. If you or any of your fellow group members do not know one another, take a few minutes to introduce yourselves. Then, to get things started, discuss the following questions:

- If you could describe your expectations for this study in one word, what would that word be?
- Why did you pick the word you did?

HEARING THE WORD

Read aloud in the group the following passage from Luke 10:25–37:

²⁵ *On one occasion an expert in the law stood up to test Jesus. “Teacher,” he asked, “what must I do to inherit eternal life?”*

²⁶ *“What is written in the Law?” he replied. “How do you read it?”*

²⁷ *He answered, “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind”; and, ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’”*

²⁸ *“You have answered correctly,” Jesus replied. “Do this and you will live.”*

²⁹ *But he wanted to justify himself, so he asked Jesus, “And who is my neighbor?”*

³⁰ *In reply Jesus said: “A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, when he was attacked by robbers. They stripped him of his clothes, beat him and went away, leaving him half dead. ³¹ A priest happened to be going down the same road, and when he saw the man, he passed by on the other side. ³² So too, a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. ³³ But a Samaritan, as he traveled, came where the man was; and when he saw him, he took pity on him. ³⁴ He went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he put the man on his own donkey, brought him to an inn and took care of him. ³⁵ The next day he took out two denarii and gave them to the innkeeper. ‘Look after him,’ he said, ‘and when I return, I will reimburse you for any extra expense you may have.’*

³⁶ *“Which of these three do you think was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?”*

³⁷ *The expert in the law replied, “The one who had mercy on him.” Jesus told him, “Go and do likewise.”*

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?

WATCHING THE VIDEO

Play the video segment for session one. As you watch, use the following outline to record any thoughts or concepts that stand out to you.

Let the people in your life know that they are not only *invited* but also *welcome*.

You do business with *buyers*, but you do life with *neighbors*.

Loving your neighbors is woven into your DNA and your faith.

God's message to you is that you don't have to be afraid anymore.

God gives you a peek at what he is doing in the world through the people around you.

Part of finding your joy in life is helping others find their joy.

God wants you to love everyone, but what you need to do is start across the street.

What's a next big step for you? Who are you going to get to know?
What is your next courageous move?

DISCUSSING THE TEACHING

Take a few minutes with your group members to discuss what you just watched and explore these concepts in Scripture.

1. In the video, Bob talks about how he was looking for a *neighbor* rather than just a *buyer* for his house because you “do life” with a neighbor. What does it mean to “do life” with someone? What’s an example of this in your life?
2. Do you feel as if you truly “know” your neighbors or just “know about” them? Explain.
3. When you think about your neighbors, what’s the hardest (or scariest) part of considering how to connect with them in new ways?

4. Bob states that we find our joy by “helping other people find theirs.” What do you think this means? How have you experienced joy through helping others?

5. Is there a difference between joy and happiness? If so, how would you define it?

6. People don’t grow where they’re *informed*—they grow where they’re *accepted*. Where does your small group or church do this well? Where could you all better grow?

DOING THE WORD

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

During this week’s teaching, Bob suggests that 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!

PERSONAL STUDY

Reflect on the content that you've covered this week in *Everybody, Always* by engaging in any or all of the following between-sessions activities. Remember, this part of the study is not about following rules or doing your homework—the activities are simply designed to give you the opportunity to jump into loving God and your neighbor with both feet. *Please be sure to read the reflection questions after each activity and make a few notes in your study guide about the experience.* There will be a time to share these reflections at the beginning of the next session.

DO: TELL YOUR STORY

During this week's teaching, Bob talks about the power of story and how one of the things that happens when you are neighbors with someone is that you get to know each other better and swap stories. This week, you are invited to do this very thing. Pick one or two people from your small group, get together with that person during the week, and just swap stories. You can get together for a meal, a coffee, or just touch base in the church parking lot. Wherever you do it, your goal is simple: *get to know each other better by sharing a bit of your lives.* Here are a few questions that you can ask to get the stories flowing:

Where did you grow up?

How long have you lived where you do now?

Do you have any siblings? What can you tell me about them?

Who were and are the most formative people in your life?

When and how did you get turned on to Jesus and church?

Why did you decide to participate in this small-group study?

If you had a whole day to yourself, how would you spend it?

What is one thing the two of us have in common?

Once you've connected with one of your group members and shared yours stories, jot down the following reflections to share next week:

How was the experience of sharing stories?

Was it easier or harder than you thought? Why?

What is something this experience taught you about yourself?

REFLECT: BE NEEDY

Read the following passage found in Matthew 18:1–5:

¹ At that time the disciples came to Jesus and asked, “Who, then, is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?” ² He called a little child to him, and placed the child among them. ³ And he said: “Truly I tell you, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. ⁴ Therefore, whoever takes the lowly position of this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. ⁵ And whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me.

One of the things Jesus is always driving home with his followers is that God’s kingdom doesn’t work like the kingdoms of this world. God’s kingdom is counterintuitive. It has a different set of values. Jesus keeps telling those of us who will listen that we will discover this kingdom in ways we least expect.

This section in the Gospel of Matthew picks up a conversation that Jesus was having with his disciples about this very thing. They had just asked him about who was greatest in his kingdom. Essentially, they wanted to know who was the best in God’s new world. They were asking, “Jesus, how do you get to the top of the ladder and succeed in your kingdom?” They wanted to know who would—as Bob puts it in the video—“get the big chair.”

To answer this question, Jesus asked a child to come over to where they were talking. Then he said, “Be like this.” Jesus went on to say that unless the disciples changed to become more and

more like this child, they wouldn't even figure out how to be part of what God was up to in the world. What was Jesus getting at by saying this to them?

Well, to live in God's world God's way, we have to first let go of all the ways this current world tells us to succeed. The kingdom of God is a place where the "best" are the least and the lowest. It's where the frail and the fragile are powerful. It's a kingdom of downward mobility, and it's a place people often find when they have failed and are in deep need.

This is part of what Jesus was illustrating with the child he called to stand among him and the disciples. Children have needs. They are not self-sufficient. They are dependent and open to help. It is exactly those qualities that assist us in finding our way into God's new world.

Can you see why a culture that values "pulling yourself up by your bootstraps" might struggle to embrace this message? Success in God's kingdom comes when you stop trying to win and embrace all the ways you keep losing.

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

Jesus says "anyone who welcomes a child welcomes me."
What does that mean to you?

Where are you frustrated by your own need right now?

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

READ: LOVE PEOPLE WHERE YOU ARE

Read the prologue and chapters 1 through 3 in *Everybody, Always*, and then reflect on the following questions:

Who are some people you know who give away love “like they’re made of it”? What are some characteristics you admire in these people?

What are some of the barriers you encounter when it comes to loving difficult people? What can you learn from Jesus’ example about how to deal with them?

What does “extravagant love” look like in your life in terms of “coloring outside the lines” and “going beyond the norms”?

Why do you think Jesus asks us to start loving others by first loving our neighbors? Who would you define as being your “neighbors”?

What are some ways that you are actively loving your neighbors? How has this involved more than just speaking with them from time to time?

Use the space below to write any other key points or questions you want to bring to the next group meeting. In preparation for your next session, read chapters 4 through 6.