SESSION 1

I’M WITH YOU

Love is not just a bunch of stuff we agree with. Love does.
Loves Does video
INTRODUCTION

Have you ever had to do something you were afraid to do? Sure. Everyone has. It is a core part of the human experience. Whether it is jumping off a high dive, riding a bike for the first time, or even professing love, everyone at some point has to do something he or she is scared of—and that’s a good thing. Good because these experiences teach us important lessons about being human and about our life with God.

First, when we do things that we are afraid of we learn that courage is not the same thing as the absence of fear. The first time a child dives into a swimming pool, it is a terrifying experience and no amount of explaining, hand-holding, or encouragement will make the fear go away. To dive into the pool, the child will have to act in spite of her fear. That is the definition of courage. Acting, even when you are afraid, is something people who are called to follow Jesus have to do all the time.

Second, after we do something that frightens us the first time, the second time is never as hard. And it is even easier the third time. Though the first jump off the diving board may be terrifying, by the third or fourth time you do it, it may start to be downright fun.

All this brings us to the third thing we learn. You may be thinking, I have a solution for this whole tension—I’ll avoid risky situations at all costs. The problem with this is (1) no one has that much control over life, and (2) these moments of risk are when we truly feel most alive. Have you ever seen a kid go over a skateboard ramp for the first time? Or watched someone complete a tall rock climb? Often you’ll find them screaming in celebration. Why? Because they just feel so alive! Because they did it! When we try things that seem daunting, our lives actually become more full and vibrant.
So, how does God factor into all of this? And what does any of it have to do with Love Does? The Love Does experience will encourage you to get out there and “do” things! You will be invited, through the sharing and activities in each session, to engage in some holy risk taking. Please, take this invitation seriously and don’t let the opportunity pass you by. Like riding a bike for the first time, the more activities and experiments you try, the less scary they become—because they turn into things you do all the time. Furthermore, every time you participate in the hands-on portions of this study you’ll be training yourself to see the world as a place where you can act creatively for and with God. You’ll become the kind of person who “does” love effortlessly, just as Jesus did.

For this first session of Love Does, Bob asks if you have ever felt stuck trying to integrate your life and your faith. Maybe there was a time when following Jesus was exciting and vibrant, but now things have started to grow stale. Do you know what he’s talking about? One of the reasons our life with God gets stagnant is because we stop taking Jesus’ invitation to live risky, courageous lives. We stop trying to do the things Jesus calls us to because they seem too scary. This week Love Does is going to provide a platform for you to be fully alive, to take risks, and get involved in bringing heaven to earth. Are you ready? Well, actually, that doesn’t matter. Let’s just jump in with both feet. And if you need to scream … all the better!

WELCOME AND CHECKING IN

Go around the group to introduce yourselves and then complete this sentence:

If I could describe my expectations for this study in one word, that word would be __________________.
LOVE DOES STUDY GUIDE

Next, watch the short video clip titled “Introduction.” Afterward, answer some or all of the following questions:

- On a scale of “thumbs-up” for positive and “thumbs-down” for negative, what was your gut reaction to Bob’s introduction?
- When it comes to integrating your faith and your life, have you ever felt stuck, or as Bob puts it, “You can’t move”? Why or why not?
- What do you think the difference is between agreeing with what Jesus says and “doing love”?

HEARING THE WORD

Read Matthew 1:18–23 aloud in the group. Then briefly answer the questions that follow.

18 This is how the birth of Jesus the Messiah came about: His mother Mary was pledged to be married to Joseph, but before they came together, she was found to be pregnant through the Holy Spirit. 19 Because Joseph her husband was faithful to the law, and yet did not want to expose her to public disgrace, he had in mind to divorce her quietly.

20 But after he had considered this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, “Joseph son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. 21 She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins.”

22 All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet: 23 “The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel” (which means “God with us”).
I’M WITH YOU

Do you think it is good news to learn that “God is with us”? Why or why not?

This famous passage about Immanuel is heard often at Christmastime. As a group, can you remember other places in the Bible that God was “with us”? If so, what are they?

WATCH THE VIDEO

Watch the Session 1 video clip, using the space below to take notes. When the video ends, take a moment to reflect on one or two things that you learned, disagreed with, or were surprised by.
GROUP DISCUSSION

First Impressions

1. Before everyone shares in the large group, turn to one or two people next to you and finish this sentence, “After watching the video, one question I now have is . . .”

Community Reflection

2. Has someone ever said to you, “I’m with you”? Who was it and what was the occasion? How did it affect you? Have you ever said the same words to someone else? What was that like?

3. Bob says that he quits something every Thursday, and that quitting can be a good thing if you “quit the right stuff.” Have you ever quit anything? Was the experience positive or negative? What did it make room for in your life?

4. How do you know the right stuff and the wrong stuff to quit?
5. What does it mean that “God will never quit us”? Does that sound like good news or bad news to you?

6. Have you ever had a dream die? Did it die “alone,” as Bob says, or were you with anyone? Did being with someone help?

7. Bob makes a distinction between being in a Bible study with someone and just “being” with someone. What’s the difference? Is this a helpful distinction? Why or why not?

8. What did you think of Bob’s story about his Young Life leader, Randy? Who has God brought into your life that you can be “a Randy” or “Immanuel” to? To whom do you need to say, “I’m with you”?
PUTTING LOVE INTO ACTION

After Bob tells his story about Randy, he challenges viewers to reach out to someone who has been a “Randy” in their lives and tell that person thank you. That is what we are going to do right now.

Think about your life and consider: Is there a person who has been there with you when the going got rough? Or a person who poured out his or her life to mentor or counsel you? Or someone who talked you out of making a bad choice or talked you into making a good one?

Identify such a person . . . and then, right now, reach out to say thanks. Send a text or an email (try Facebook, if you’ve lost touch). Borrow a smartphone if you didn’t bring one or use a piece of paper to write a letter to send later. The more immediate, the better. Just say, “Thank you for being there for me.” Be as specific as you feel comfortable, but practice the risk of gratitude.

Reflect together afterward:

• What was this experience like?

• Did anyone get a response from the person he or she contacted? If so, what was it?
• How has this activity been an example of love “doing” things?

CLOSING PRAYER

Close the meeting by praying silently for the person on your left. Pray that each of you will have the courage to “do” the love of Jesus this week, wherever God takes you.
SESSION 1: WHAT LOVE DOES THIS WEEK

You are invited to further explore the challenge of Love Does by engaging in any or all of the following activities between sessions. Remember, this part of Love Does is not about following rules or doing your homework. These activities (categorized as Do, Reflect, and Read) are designed to give you opportunity to jump into the risk of God’s kingdom with both feet. Please answer the reflection questions after the activity as a way to: (1) process the experience, and (2) be able to recall it during check-in time at the next session.

DO: BE A QUITTER

In the video Bob tells a compelling story about the time he quit high school and made a plan to move to Yosemite National Park to rock climb. Even though that plan did not work out very well, it led to an interesting discipline. Once a week Bob quits something.

You are invited to do the same this week. Pick something you need to give up (i.e., texting while you drive) or something you enjoy but decide to put aside for a certain amount of time (i.e., breakfast and lunch for one day, television during the evening, checking email/Facebook after dinner).

Bob’s point is that when we quit “stuff,” it makes space for Jesus to bring “new stuff” into our lives. Don’t rush to fill any new time or emotional space you have with replacement noise, activity, or entertainment. Pay attention in prayer to what Jesus brings into your life so you can say yes to it.
Reflection Questions:

• What did you quit?

• Why did you quit what you did and what was your experience like?

• Did you find anything new came into your life through this process?

• What did you learn about yourself by “being a quitter”? What did you learn about God?

REFLECT: BE SALTY

For the Reflect sections of this study guide, we will be going through portions of Jesus’ epic teaching in Matthew 5–7, also
known as the Sermon on the Mount. In this kingdom-of-God manifesto, Jesus gets extremely practical about what it means to live in God’s world God’s way and to bring about truth, beauty, and justice as we go.

This week, read Matthew 5:13–16:

13“You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled underfoot.

14“You are the light of the world. A town built on a hill cannot be hidden. 15Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. 16In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven.”

Jesus tells His hearers that they are the salt of the earth and the light of the world. You may be familiar with some of the background in these two metaphors. More than it was known as a flavoring, salt was primarily used to dry and preserve meats in the ancient Near East. Jesus’ followers will act in ways that preserve and sustain the earth because God’s mission is one of healing and restoration—and that healing and restoration includes the creation itself. If the people of God aren’t working to sustain that agenda, they are not doing much good and might as well be tossed out.

Furthermore, Jesus claims that His people are the light of the world. He draws on the common image of a lamp to describe the way that, like light shining into a dark corner, God’s people are supposed to reveal things as they really are. Christians believe that God’s kingdom is here now, and that things can be here on earth as they are in heaven. This is something we don’t simply assert with our lips but actually demonstrate with our lives.
What is so compelling about both of Jesus’ metaphors here is how functional they are. Jesus seems to expect that the faith of His followers will manifest itself in lives of action that are useful to and positive for the here and now.

Reflection Questions:

• What else do you think Jesus meant when He talked about being salt and light?

• What are the good ways you have seen Christians be “salty” with their lives and faith? Are there negative ways you have seen Christians be “salty” with their faith?

• Is it possible to snuff out your light with the way you try to be salt?

• Where are you being “salty” in your Christianity? Where do you want to grow?
READ: “JUST SAY YES”

Reflection Questions:
• Did you have a positive or negative reaction to Bob’s story?

• In this chapter Bob says, “I think God sometimes uses the completely inexplicable events in our lives to point us toward Him” (p. 64). Do you think this is true? Why or why not? Have you ever had an “inexplicable event” point you toward God? What inexplicable events are happening in your life right now?

• Is it hard or easy for you to say yes? Why did you answer as you did? How has saying or not saying yes affected your faith for the last year?