HOME GROUPS AT THE GATHERING CHURCH

At the Gathering Church, we believe that everyone’s best chance at connecting with God comes through connecting with others. Home groups offer a structure for gathering throughout the week to learn with and encourage others. You’ll be surprised what knowing others and being known by others will do for your faith. You may even be surprised at where and how you see God working in the lives, families, faces, and neighborhoods of those you’re learning, growing, praying, eating, and doing life together with.

Doing life together means sharing joys and burdens, questions and answers, experiences and opportunities.

Doing life together means following God with others and being formed into people that look and act and love like Christ with others, because oftentimes they can see it happening before and better than you can.

Doing life together means being a part of a group that experiences God’s love and grace so vividly and bountifully that it spills over to those who haven’t experienced it yet.

HOW TO USE THE GUIDE

This guide has been compiled* as a companion to Bob Goff’s book, LOVE DOES. As you read chapters in the book, also read a chapter in the Bible. Hold them next to each other and see how some of Bob’s stories represent practical outworkings of God’s word. When you finish a chapter, ask yourself some questions. These will help you communicate well in your group and prompt some opportunities for personal insight and application. A major hope through this season is that we, as a church, will be inspired and invigorated to discover and articulate how God’s love is active and operative in our lives, our families, our communities, and our world. We hope that an outcome of this study will be a vibrant and active pouring out of that knowledge and love.

READING SCHEDULE

Session 1: Introduction-Chapter 4
Session 2: Chapter 5-Chapter 10
Session 3: Chapter 11-Chapter 16
Session 4: Chapter 17-Chapter 21
Session 5: Chapter 22-Chapter 26
Session 6: Chapter 27-Epilogue

*These questions are a combination of the Love Does Discussion Questions prepared and offered by the publisher and original questions created by Chris and Rachel Breslin.
My brothers and sisters, believers in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ must not show favoritism. Suppose a man comes into your meeting wearing a gold ring and fine clothes, and a poor man in filthy old clothes also comes in. If you show special attention to the man wearing fine clothes and say, “Here’s a good seat for you,” but say to the poor man, “You stand there” or “Sit on the floor by my feet,” have you not discriminated among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts?

Listen, my dear brothers and sisters: Has not God chosen those who are poor in the eyes of the world to be rich in faith and to inherit the kingdom he promised those who love him? But you have dishonored the poor. Is it not the rich who are exploiting you? Are they not the ones who are dragging you into court? Are they not the ones who are blasphemying the noble name of him to whom you belong?

If you really keep the royal law found in Scripture, “Love your neighbor as yourself,” you are doing right. But if you show favoritism, you sin and are convicted by the law as lawbreakers. For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles at just one point is guilty of breaking all of it. For he who said, “You shall not commit adultery,” also said, “You shall not murder.” If you do not commit adultery but do commit murder, you have become a lawbreaker.

Speak and act as those who are going to be judged by the law that gives freedom, because judgment without mercy will be shown to anyone who has not been merciful. Mercy triumphs over judgment.

What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if someone claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save them?

James 2:14-26

How does this passage of Scripture sit with you? Is your first instinct, “No way. Grace means I don’t have to do anything to earn favor. How can James say my faith is dead?” If so, you’re not alone, reformer Martin Luther famously called the book of James “the epistle of straw.” He, like many of us, has great difficulty reconciling James’ exhortation with the sheer gratuity of grace. It’s free and doesn’t depend on anything we’ve done.

Or do you think, “Yeah! I’m so tired of people who think that faith is passive.” Dallas Willard helpfully put it this way: “Grace is opposed to earning not effort. Earning is an attitude. Effort is an action.” As you read Bob Goff’s book, read with a lens to see how God’s grace and love can be lived: creatively and extravagantly expressed in our everyday, normal lives. Not all of us (in fact a miniscule percentage of us) has a life like Bob’s, with such amazing circumstances and resources. But all of us have chances to do; to actively love well, because we are loved well by God.
How do we reconcile the seeming conflict between “just being” and not striving to “fix” with a calling to do?

We are studying this active, mobile, intentional way of living/loving. Can this type of love also be still? Quiet? Simply present?

Is there a time when someone has been “with you,” as Randy was for Bob? What difference did it make in your life?

What’s the difference between treating someone as a project and treating them as a friend? In your experience, how might the line get blurred?

Are there times when you have loved with presence and sacrifice? What was the outcome?

Bob describes “a love that operates more like a sign language than being spoken outright.” What kind of sign language might you be most fluent in? How do you show love in your life right now?

Think about Jesus’ role as “Immanuel—God with us.” How has he been “with you” so far, either in your life or in the life of someone you know?

Consider the ways that, if we’re not careful and without God’s help, we’ll be conformed to the patterns of this world. David Foster Wallace famously mentioned in his Kenyon College Commencement speech a parable about two young fish swimming along until they meet an older fish. The older fish nods to them and says, “Morning, boys, how’s the water?” After they swim for a minute one looks over to the other and says, “What the [heck] is water?” We get so accustomed to our lives, habits, and patterns that we eliminate a chance for God to break in and heal and transform us. Walk through your day and week and consider all of the things that you take for granted and ask God what renewal and transformation might look like.

Is being atypical an invitation or a calling? In what ways was Jesus atypical? In what ways was he typical?

How is God inviting you into “a life that’s moving away from typical”? Have there been any clues so far?
Everyone has a sneaking suspicion that they’re a little bit weird— a little bit atypical. How do you react to those suspicions in yourself? What are the quirks God gave you?

What are the pros and cons of being typical? How do you know if something’s coming from a genuine place, or one of conformity?

What’s an example of someone you’ve witnessed being 100% themselves? What about being themselves and following God at the same time? How did that affect those around them?

Bob says, “There’s nothing wrong with being typical, I guess, but there is nothing fundamentally right about it either.” Discuss the notion of conformity having become “right” in Christianity. How do you think Christians got that reputation? Do you believe that is changing?

Meditate on the great love of God that makes us his children even when we treat him like an enemy. Consider the ways God has wooed us (creation, forgiveness, beauty, friendship, grace) and the response such things warrant from a child to his/her Father.

What are some things you believe God planned in advance to “wow” you? To show His love specifically for and to you? Are you looking at life/people/creation/circumstances through this lens? Do you feel that you are loved with “a love that never grows tired or is completely finished finding ways to fully express itself?” (24). What would change if you were loved like that?

How does Ryan exemplify the concept of “audacious love”? How did Bob audaciously love him back?

What do you think it was about Ryan that made Bob agree to do all those extreme things to help him? What was it about Bob that made him willing to cross the line?

Bob says, “Being ‘engaged’ isn’t just an event that happens when a guy gets on one knee...being engaged is a way of doing life, a way of living and loving.” How are you engaged at this time in your life?

If we are the beloved of Jesus, and He keeps expressing his love for us through the world around us, how and where do you feel it most?

As you read Ryan in Love, read 1 John 3:1-3
The gospel could be succinctly put: “God finds us.” Consider how, like the lost sheep, coin, or son, you’re “prone to wander” but more importantly the lengths Jesus goes, even to death, to find you. Consider the Father’s joy upon your return and the fanfare he’s planned.

Put yourself in the shoes of each character in the story of the “lost son.” What does it feel like and when have you felt like: The lost son? The older brother? The father?

What failure in your life are you most grateful for? Why?

Have you ever had a fantastically spectacular failure like Bob’s? What did it do to you?

Bob says, “The thing I love about God is He intentionally guides people into failure.” Have you felt this in your life? How?

Are you benefiting from a failure right now, from either recent times or the past?

Our expectations have the ability to breed idols, false ideas about what should be and how. They make us impatient, and tempt us to control the situation. We’re often frustrated when these things we construct fail us. As Moses went to meet with God on the mountain, the people he was leading were making their own gods at the base of the mountain. When have you been frustrated, disappointed, impatient, or controlling in a situation? When have your expectations later been revealed to be “idols” or “fakes?”

In what ways do you find yourself trying to shape your circumstances? Do you plan to do it? Why do you think you do that?

What do you find yourself wanting most at this point in your life? Why is it so important to you, and how did it get that way? Could it be blocking your view of God in some way?

Bob says, “When we want something that bad, it’s easy to mistake what we truly need for the thing we really want.” How is this true for us culturally? What idols or golden calves are standing in for real needs? When, in your experience, has God known what you needed better than you have?

What “Dear Bob”-type letters have left creases in you? Could they be forming something new?

How have you experienced the power of the right words being said to you?

Bob says, “Ordinary people like you and me can launch each other.” Have you ever launched someone else, or witnessed it?

How do you know when to wait on God vs. when you are "over-spiritualizing" a decision that God just wants you to make? Is there such a thing as “over-spiritualization”?

Bob wonders “if we can launch people better than a dean [or someone with a lot of power] because we’re ordinary.” Why would this be? What are some things that stop us from launching people?

Imagine yourself reclining at the table with Jesus when a disheveled woman bursts in and not only makes a mess but, for all intents and purposes, wastes thousands of dollars on a one-time show of affection. Some of Jesus’ friends were scandalized because they thought that there were far better ways to mobilize those resources to help people. What would your reaction be? Why was such an apparent waste so treasured by Jesus?

Have you ever felt love that was like “an energy that has to be dissipated”? If so, what did it lead you to do? Is “dissipating” always appropriate? Is it ever selfish? Untimely? Wrong?

What costs have you or those close to you paid for love? What was the pay-off?

Have you experienced God convincing you to love Him back? How does He do this?

What makes you stop and stare in amazement? How might that be God pursuing you?
Our greatest obstacles to faith and faithfulfulness can sometimes be the places we feel most secure. Our greatest brokenness can sometimes be the places where we’ve most assumed that we’re whole and strong. Paul gives the Philippians his list of credentials before considering them garbage. His gains are in fact his losses when his vision is corrected in light of Christ. What are some of the things you’re most proud of? In what way might some of these strengths, traits or possessions actually be obstacles, defense mechanisms or weaknesses? In what ways are you weaker than you normally let on?

How would you describe your “spiritual condition” at this moment? Are you healthy? Thriving? Surviving? Sick? Terminally ill?

What kind of grit tends to keep us from allowing ourselves to be “served up” to others?

For a lot of people, serving a wedding cake with rocks in it (or allowing ourselves to be used when we’re broken) is something we just can’t get behind. But what are some ways God could use your specific brokenness?

How is Jesus’ logic different from our logic, or from the logic of the world?

Bob says, “The only thing Jesus said He couldn’t serve up were people who were full of themselves or believed the lie that they were who they used to be before they met Him.” What keeps them from being served? Do you fall into either of these categories?

Notice in the story of Moses’ calling: first Moses’ assent: “Here I Am,” and then the ways that he makes excuses and backs down. What are some of the things God called Moses to? Why do you think Moses started to back down? What caused him to be self-conscious? Can you think of a time in your own life when your own God-consciousness gave way to self-consciousness?

Has God ever asked you or someone you know to do something completely inexplicable? How’d it go?

Can you think of a time you’ve said yes, no, or ignored a call from God? How do those times give you insight into God’s plan and character?
As you read The Interviews, read Matthew 5:43-48

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus challenges his listeners to love their enemies, not just their friends. What do you think he means in verse 45: “that you may be children of your Father in heaven.” How are these two things related?

Practically, how are we to love our enemies? When have you been loved by someone who you would consider your enemy?

If Bob’s kids showed up in your office and asked what you were hoping for, what would you tell them?

Why do you think the leaders opened up to the kids?

How can we relate to each other more on this kid-level?

What are the risks and rewards inherent in opening our lives and homes to one another? Does one outweigh the other?

Bob says, “There’s a big difference between being pen pals and being real pals. . . Friends do—they don’t just think about it.” Can you think of a time in your friendships when you experienced the shift from pen pal to real pal? How can that magic be recreated?

As you read There’s More Room, read Luke 14:15-24

If this banquet parable were written now what would be some of the excuses you’d most likely use to avoid the invitation?

What might it mean or look like to be people obsessed with accepting and offering invitations to the “poor, crippled, blind, and lame?”

If “life is like a sweepstakes where you must be present to win,” what does present look like to you? How does one become fully engaged with Jesus?

Has “the Christian life” ever felt like the set of National Treasure 2 to you? Or have you ever felt like an outsider? What might Jesus do about this?

Discuss a time when you received a surprise invitation you were glad you took. What about one you regret rejecting?
Is “there more room” in your church? In your life? How can more space be made for those Jesus would have included?

Have you ever experienced the disappearance of an obstacle after accepting an invitation from God? If so, how can that spur you on?

As you read Wow, What a Hit!, read 1 Peter 2:1-10

What does it do to your outlook or ego to be called “chosen,” “royal,” “priest,” “God’s own?” Does that change the way you look at the mundane parts of everyday life? Is it important that all these things aren’t solo, but plural?

Recall some words of encouragement that really stuck with you. How did they change you?

Do you really believe you are the apple of God’s eye? What evidence is there for this?

Bob describes his coach “telling me I was a real ball player—he saw it in me and was just calling it out.” List some opportunities you can make to do this for people in your life.

What’s the relationship between God’s encouragement and our humility? How does one inform the other?

Recall a time someone encouraged you despite (or even because of) your shortcomings—calling out something that may not have been there yet. Did their predictions come to pass?

As you read Bigger & Better, read Matthew 13:44-45

In a spree of parables found in Matthew’s gospel, Jesus mentions the field with a treasure in it, that when stumbled upon is worth selling everything for. Does this parable strike you as odd? Borderline unethical? How does the man’s attitude relate to not only the worth but also the excitement with which we’re to approach God and his kingdom?

Bob draws a connection between the dime in the Bigger and Better game and our pride and self-preservation. What’s an example of a dime you’re holding on to rather than trading up?

What specifically keeps you holding on to that dime in your life?

What’s the difference between sacrificing something for God and trading up for Him?
Bob says, “When we get our security from Christ, we no longer have to look for it in the world, and that’s a pretty good trade.” How have you experienced this? How would you like to?

What in your life tends to make you think you “matter” in the eyes of the world? What might it be like to give it up to God?

As you read A New Kind of Diet, read Acts 19:11-20

The story about Sceva’s sons is high drama. Filled with irony, the evil spirit knows exactly the ruse that these men are perpetrating even though everyone else is clueless. Even the best of Christians are sometimes tempted to present themselves as A+ religious people at the expense of sincerity and authenticity, for various reasons. In what way are you tempted? How might your authenticity in that hard area be a gift to others?

What are the major “head-fakes” that you’ve encountered when talking to people who have rejected religion? How have these things tainted religion for them?

If you’re still in contact with those people, what’s a good way to lovingly show them the real thing?

Is something about faith or religion faking you out? Or has it in the past? How did you discover it, and what did you do?

What fake thing angers you the most? “Lite” cream cheese? Fake leather? Fake sympathy? How might you be called to combat it?

As you read A Word Not to Use, read Ephesians 2:1-10

Paul tells the church at Ephesus that they are God’s handiwork, the Greek word “poema,” meaning something like a poem, a masterpiece. Consider the mystery of being conformed (re-formed!) to the image of God, while at the same time remaining so uniquely you. Consider what it might mean for God, by his Spirit, to be not only a good and wise Author, but also good and wise Editor. He sharpens us, gives us direction, and enriches us, while making our words undeniably ours.

What are some examples of Christian “spin” you’ve encountered? What could be the antidote?
How do you think the church may have gotten to the point where it sometimes “presents God’s plan like a prospectus promising a return on investment”? What’s the real need?

Pinpoint a couple of words in your faith language that are in danger of losing their power. What are some alternatives? (Thesauruses encouraged.)

Discuss the line between making an effort to keep things fresh and authentic and selling ourselves out to appear cool or desirable. What is our responsibility and what isn’t?

Bob says God “doesn’t spell out everything for us in life, but He does tell us how we can write our lives better; and trusting Him implicitly is always the right place to start.” In what way might God be asking you to trust Him?

As you read Hunting Grizzlies, read Romans 3:21-28

How do you think about sin? Read Romans 3:21-28 in a more conventional translation and then read it in the Message paraphrase. Perhaps rather than focusing on us “missing the mark” as the shooters, as if God had a target and we didn’t have a powerful or accurate enough bow or gun, what if we were the arrow, moving further astray with no hope of getting back on track? That we “compiled this long and sorry record as and proved that we are utterly incapable of living the glorious lives God wills for us,” but then “God did it for us!”

Regardless of your feelings on guns, what personal lessons can we learn from these two pieces of shooting advice?

- “You need to look through the scope at the things that are far away, but you also need to take your eye away long enough to see what’s close.”
- “It’s all about how you pull the trigger . . . If you pull hard, it will jerk the gun off target. So you need to pull the trigger super slow.”

What’s the best approach to take when we see people messing up? What about when we mess up?
As you read *Corner Store Economics*, read Mark 12:41-44

Why do you think Jesus valued the widow’s meager contribution so much?

How have you witnessed grace like the storekeeper showed Bob as a child?

When have you come up short and been shown generosity? Or shown it to others?

How has Jesus’ “reverse economy” of giving and receiving played out in your life?

List a few people you could be the shopkeeper for. How can you add value to their pennies this week?

As you read *Catching a Ride*, read Matthew 4:1-11

What are the three main “temptations” that the devil throws at Jesus? Why do you think he thought these three were particularly enticing?

When have you had to bail out of a “creepy-van” situation or relationship? What was the turning point that made you realize it was time to go?

Discuss the relationship between showing grace to people and limiting your involvement with those who get creepy. How might Jesus handle this?

What are some good ways to “ask people where they are going before you get in with them”? In your professional life? In personal relationships?

What do you think of Bob’s statement, “You become like the people you hang around, and to a great degree, you end up going wherever they’re headed”? Has this been true in your experience?
In Paul’s second letter to the Corinthians, he gushes with pride that the Corinthians are so dependable. How have you experienced the Church to be a dependable/faithful/trustworthy mirror of the dependable/faithful/trustworthy God we follow? When have you experienced the exact opposite?

Is there something you keep apologizing to God for, as Lynn kept apologizing to Bob? Why?

Everybody struggles with the fear of becoming dependent on others. Where can you stand to rely on others more?

How might your life be different if you consciously sought to be less independent?

Bob describes wanting to “leak Jesus” after having his life flipped upside down by Him. How does this play out for people you’ve known? For you?

What do you think the disciples heard and felt when Jesus told them to leave their nets and follow him on the adventures of being “fishers of men?”

What is “the difference between an adventure and a program”? How might some of the programs in your life be turned into adventures?

Bob says, “God asks what it is He’s made us to love, what it is that captures our attention, what feeds that deep indescribable need of our souls to experience the richness of the world He made. And then, leaning over us, He whispers, “Let’s go do that together.” Does that evoke anything for you? What has He made you to love?

When have you crashed and burned in a spectacularly awesome way? How is that part of your adventure?

Bob describes faith in Jesus as “an invitation without a lot of details.” How has your faith defied expectations or surprised you so far?

As you read Hearing Aid, read 1 Kings 19:9-18

When have you listened for God in the roar, the earthquake, or the fire in your own life to miss his gentle whisper?

What if God’s voice is more like white noise, a call that is always there, you just have to remove all of the noise that overpowers it? What might you have to eliminate in order to hear Him?

Bob lists some of the ways a person might hear from God: “Through flowers, other people, an uncomfortable sense, a feeling of joy, goosebumps, a newfound talent, or an appreciation we acquire over time.” When do you feel you are hearing from God? And what happens when your internal tuning fork goes off?

If God’s plan for us is based on our hardwired loves and passions, and His character, what clues has He given you about what direction to go in?

What are the major things you can “triangulate off of” to see which direction God is going?

If we are God’s plan for the whole world, how might that play out for you and the people you’re on this trip with?

Name a specific time God has spoken to you through another person. What did they say, and did it change you?

As you read The Puppeteer, read Luke 24:36-49

For all the reasons that the risen Jesus’ appearance to his disciples is remarkable, perhaps one of the most overlooked are his nail scars. Sure they prove that he his who he says he is and went through the awful death they all mourned. But it also tells us a little something about resurrection; about perfected, immortal bodies. Have you ever considered that our resurrected, immortal bodies will still show signs of the struggle and pain of this life? Isn’t it odd that these scars are somehow beautiful markers of who Jesus is, transfigured in the light of God’s Spirit raising Christ from the dead? What scars do you hope God will make into badges of his faithfulness?
It seems to be human nature to protect ourselves by putting out a fake version of our priceless originals, in case of damage. What elements of your fake self are different from your real self?

When have you taken a hit for being the real you? How did it affect you?

When have you felt loved and accepted for being the real you? What does that show us about God’s love?

Our culture presents many ways to concoct a convincing fake version of ourselves—social media, image management, self-marketing, appearance obsession, etc. What can we do to supplant these things and be more vulnerable as our true selves?

How can a fake be spotted? In what loving ways can we encourage people to bring out their own priceless originals?