



**Small Group Guide Week 1 INTRO:** Earth is just a really big neighborhood. If you think about it, we are all somebody's neighbor and they are ours. God gave us neighbors as a gift, to be our teachers and to help prepare us for our final neighborhood in heaven. Sometimes, though, our neighbors are difficult. Sometimes we don't understand them, and sometimes we'd like them to be more like us. Jesus taught the world a great deal about loving *everybody always*, especially the people who are difficult.

1. Do you have a memory of a favorite neighborhood? What did you like about it?

### **READ Luke 10:25–37**

1. What do you imagine was the attitude of the lawyer?
2. Why does Jesus bring up the law?
3. What does it mean to love your neighbor as *yourself*?

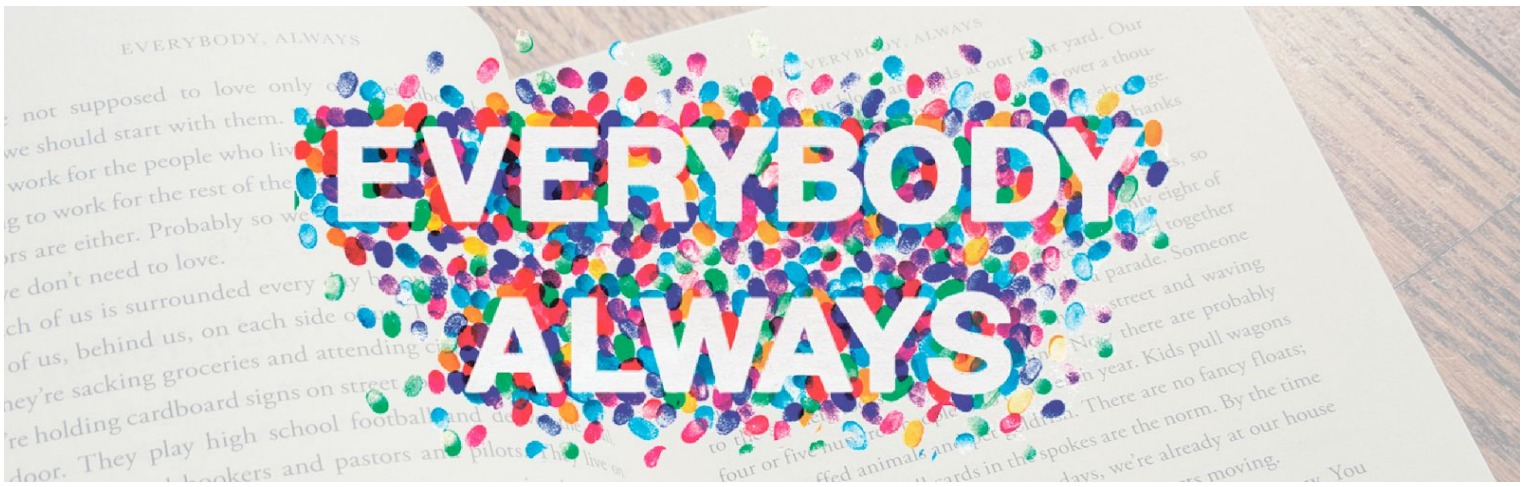
### **REFLECTION QUESTIONS:**

1. Bob Goff says that “love is not something we fall into; love is something we become.” (p. 2) What does it mean to *become* love?
2. Are the people you surround yourself with more like you or different from you? Why?
3. What makes loving people, whether you're more alike or different, so hard?
4. Do you have any “enemies?” Be honest. What makes them an enemy?
5. How would our community be different if we took Jesus' command to love our enemies seriously?

**OUTRO:** Jesus has invited everyone to participate in the Kingdom of God, and in his radical Kingdom of love there is no place for judgment, exclusion, or hate. When we love those who are difficult we are saying Yes to Jesus' invitation to a new kind of neighborhood. Go find someone you think is wrong or someone who has wronged you and decide to love that person the way you want Jesus to love you. Living like this is living with God.

### **PRAY TOGETHER:**

Pray Psalm 139 and substitute “I” for the name of someone you disagree with.



**Small Group Guide Week 2 INTRO:** Whether it's an impressive job, a social group, or a belief system, castles are everywhere. They may provide security, but they also keep other people out, including their vulnerabilities and needs, many of which aren't of their own choosing. The thing is, Jesus never calls you to build a castle for yourself. He calls you to build a kingdom for others. Castles are built with moats and judgment to keep people out, but God's Kingdom is built on grace through Jesus Christ.

1. How are we a castle building society? How do we decide who's in and who's out?

**READ Luke 15:11–32:**

1. The younger son has nothing and no one helps (verse 16). How does this lack of help contribute to the younger son's destitution?
2. Why does the father embrace his son before the son apologizes?
3. What does it mean to be "dead" and "alive" again? (verse 24)

**REFLECTION QUESTIONS:**

1. Describe the younger son. Is he someone you would want to invite into your inner circle?
2. Are you quicker to judge the younger son, empathize with him, or pity him? Why?
3. What aspects of your life are like a castle? Who sits outside the moat?
4. What would it look like to extend your community to those who are often on the outside?

**OUTRO:** In an individualistic society, our successes and failures are our own. We see the younger brother as a screw up who was offered grace, but often ignore the context of his situation. Other factors, like famine and a lack of community, played a part in his story. The father skips telling off his son and goes straight to a mighty embrace. Struggling people don't need judgment, they need a life-saving alternative. They need love. Choose the alternative. Open up your life to needy people—you're one of them!

**PRAY TOGETHER:** *Pray Psalm 8 and consider how God's mindfulness of you leads you to be mindful of others.*



**Small Group Guide Week 3 INTRO:** After a particularly bad day in the garden, God addresses Adam and Eve with a simple question: *Where are you?* In this moment, God responds to the first signs of brokenness in the world with a question of identity. Members of the church of Jesus Christ have one thing in common—they have heard God’s whisper amidst their brokenness and said Yes to becoming a people marked by love.

1. When you mess up, what are your first thoughts? How do you believe God sees you?

**READ John 9:1–11:**

1. Who do you identify with the most in this story? Why?
2. Do Christians need to “wash” to receive sight?
3. What does it say about the crowd and God’s power if no one believed the man’s story?

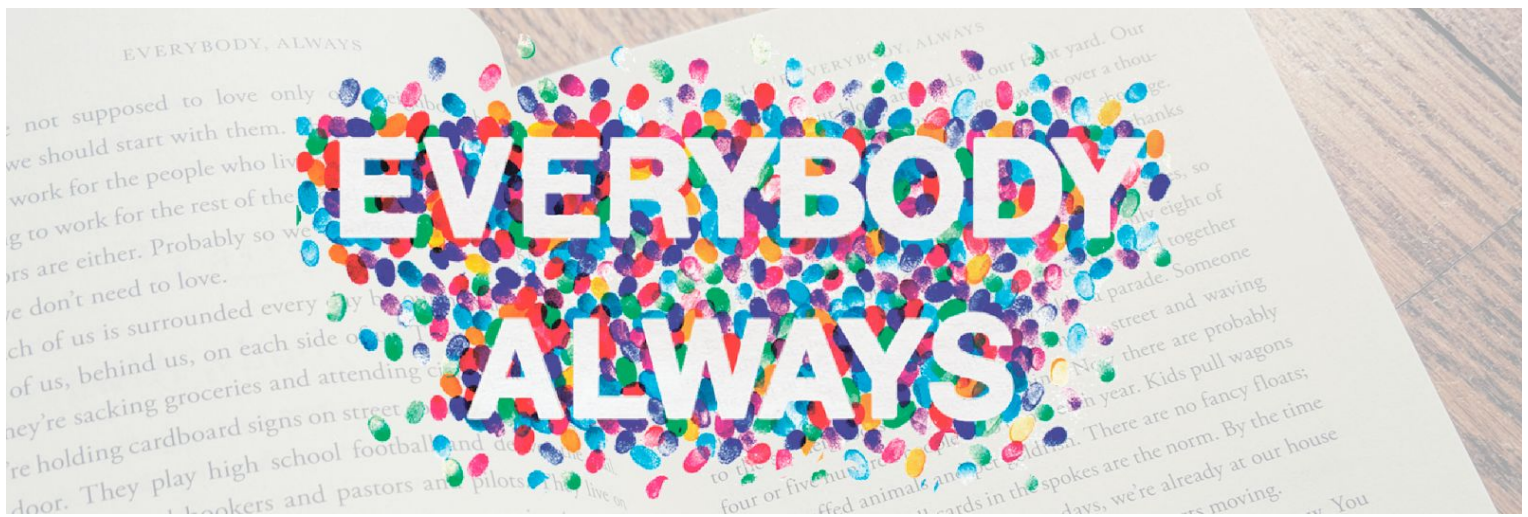
**REFLECTION QUESTIONS:**

1. “God doesn't like us more when we succeed or less when we fail.” (p. 102) Why is this so hard to grasp? Are you more defined by your sin or God’s love for you?
2. Bob quotes another blind man who, when being healed, needs a second touch. How does his recognition of continued need contribute to his healing? Is it the same for you?
3. Lex jumps because he trusts his friend. What keeps you from trusting Jesus like this?
4. Read Romans 5:8. How does being loved as a sinner affect how you love others?

**OUTRO:** Jesus did not merely identify with the blind man’s suffering; he got in the mud with him. As followers of Christ, we are called to get in the mud with those who suffer, but we do this in recognition that we, too, are in the mud! As broken people, we stand on the same ground as everybody else in God’s eyes. The only difference is that we have been washed by the revelation of God’s love for us in Jesus Christ. God loves you, regardless of what you have done or will do. Be washed clean to go and love in Jesus’ name.

**PRAY TOGETHER:**

*Pray Psalm 32 and rejoice in the joy that comes from God's forgiveness.*



**Small Group Guide Week 4 INTRO:** The religious elite in Jesus' time kept their distance from sinners, but that isn't how Jesus lived. He drew close to people with inconvenient needs, distasteful habits, or wicked character. Faith is not simply about what God does for you; it's also about what He calls you to do for others. If we are following in Jesus' footsteps, we will find ourselves loving messy and messed-up people and discover we are messed up, too.

1. Who was your best friend growing up? What did you have in common?

### **READ Matthew 25:31-46**

1. What inheritance do you hope for from God?
2. Who are the "least of these brothers and sisters of mine" (verse 40) in today's world?
3. Think about the needs Jesus listed. What other needs exist in our community that we can meet (or not)?

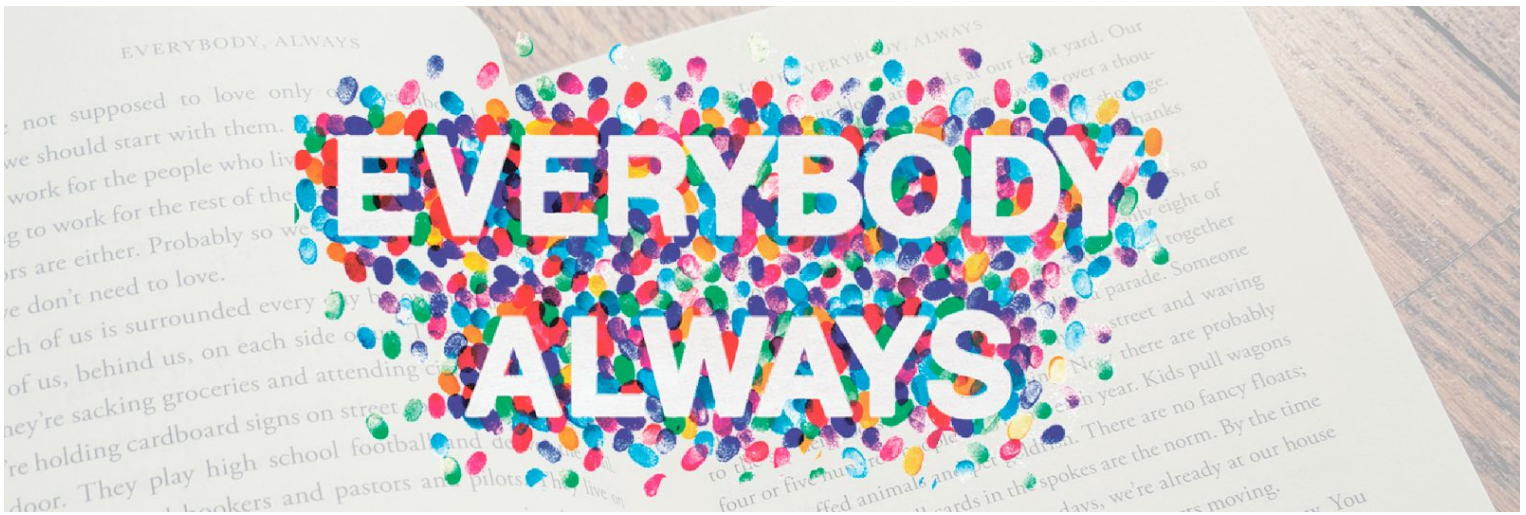
### **REFLECTION QUESTIONS:**

1. Why do you think Jesus has a special concern for those in need?
2. What would Jesus' life have looked like if he only spent time with "good" people?
3. "Walter thinks every needy person he meets is Jesus." (p. 145) Do you think like that?
4. How does a "successful" American life separate you from needy people?
5. In ways both small and large, how is loving messy people hard?

**OUTRO:** We normally talk about God's plan as a blueprint for our lives, but we can also think of God's plan as the life He calls us to live. What if instead of waiting for a special call from God, we took Jesus at his word that whatever we do for those in need, we do (or don't do) for him? In any given day, how many opportunities do you have to feed, listen to, care for, encourage, or house Jesus? How many opportunities slip by? Are you ready to love him?

### **PRAY TOGETHER:**

*Pray that God would give you opportunities to care for messy people. Eph. 2:10*



**Small Group Guide Week 5 INTRO:** “What if you weren’t afraid anymore?” (p. 185) What if you weren't afraid of what people would say if you openly shared your faith, or if you gave God control over your finances? What if you weren’t afraid to let go of your agenda to help someone in trouble? Simply put, fear keeps us from listening to Jesus’ voice. Be not afraid. Follow your Shepherd’s voice into new territory.

1. When you were a kid, what were you afraid of?

## **READ 2 Timothy 1:6–12**

1. How would you describe the Gospel in one sentence?
2. Is the call to join in suffering for every Christian or just for some?
3. Why is Timothy unashamed of his suffering? Would you feel the same way?

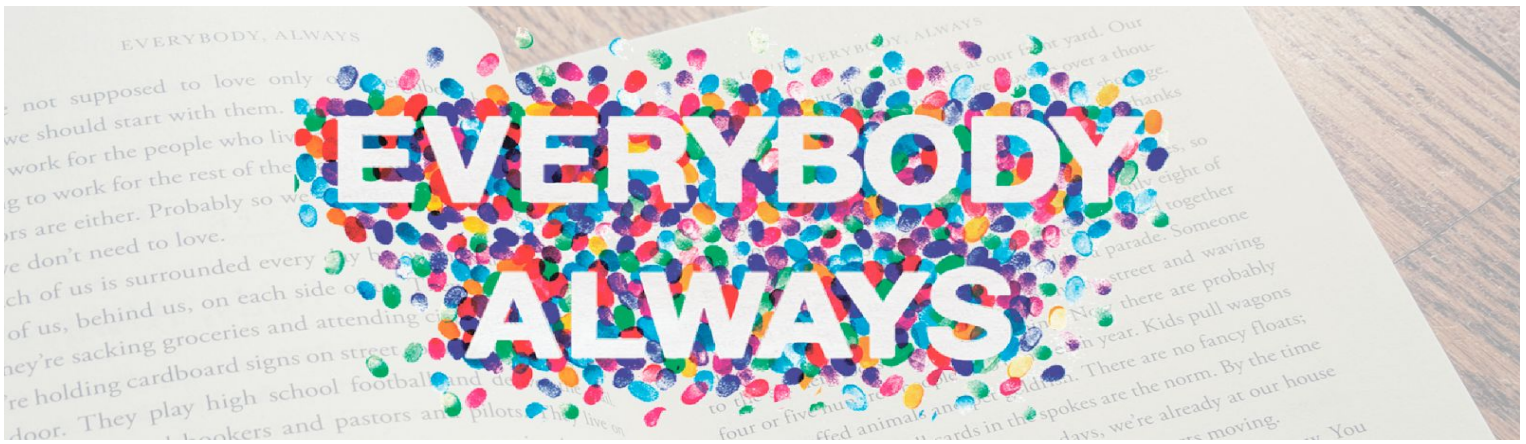
## **REFLECTION QUESTIONS:**

1. Do you think your faith tends to be fearless or safe/timid?
2. Are you scared to love fearlessly? Why? What do you have to gain and lose?
3. In Uganda, people are afraid to confront the power of witch doctors. What powers are we afraid to confront locally?
4. What would your faith look like if you accepted God’s call to “be not afraid?”
5. For Bob, witch doctors felt beyond love. Who feels beyond love to you?

**OUTRO:** Loving fearlessly is difficult because we like to maintain our comfortable distance from complex people and situations. Yet when we hold onto the “good life” we’ve built, the power of the gospel stalls. Do not fear what you will lose when you love people or suffer on their behalf. God equips whom God calls. You, my friend, are called.

## **PRAY TOGETHER:**

*Pray that the Spirit would bring you courage and power.*



**Small Group Guide Week 6 INTRO:** We hope you have had some challenging conversations over the past five weeks, but challenging conversations on their own aren't enough. The tricky thing about love is that knowing how to love doesn't matter unless you practice it. Today, then, is about planning, action, and embodying love in our daily lives.

1. What has been the most challenging idea over the past five weeks?

### **READ Matthew 5:43–48**

1. What does the word “that” mean in verse 47?
2. What does it mean that God sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous?
3. Why does Jesus ask us to be perfect? Isn't that impossible?

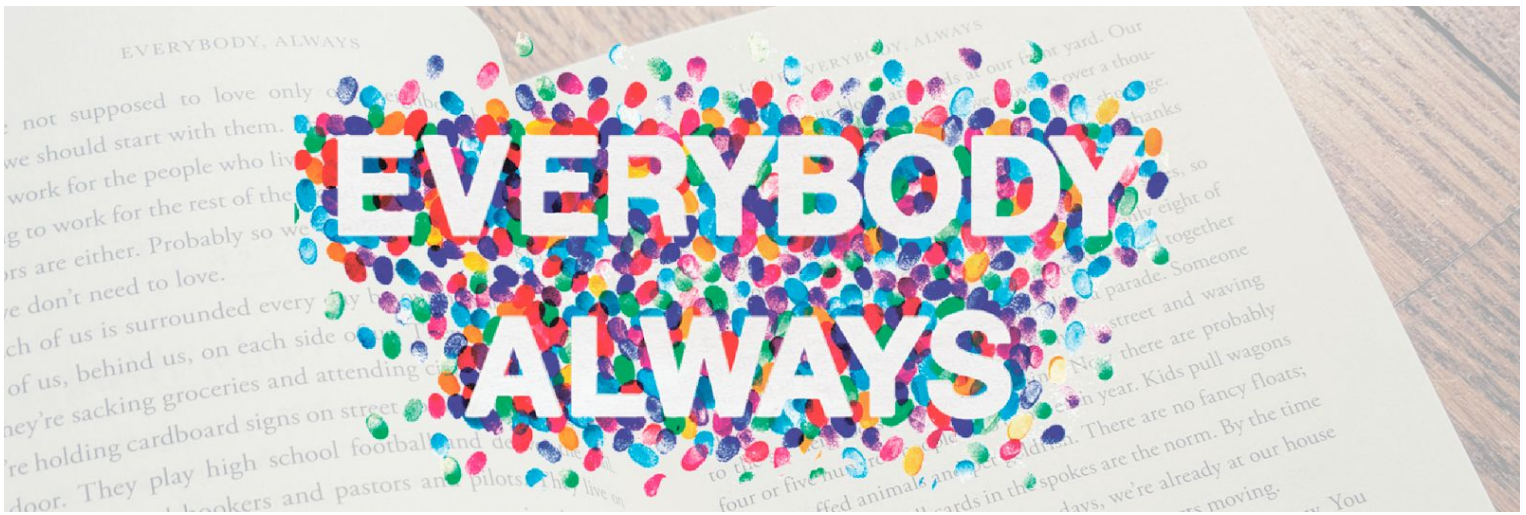
### **REFLECTION QUESTIONS:**

1. Who do you need to love better in your life? (Maybe an enemy?) Make a list of a few ways to prayerfully change your actions to be more loving. Does this list excite you or does it feel like more work?
2. What do you need to be freed from so you can give away love more readily?
3. What support do you need to actually make these changes?

**OUTRO:** There is a wonderful element of excitement when you plan to work alongside God because God works through willing followers. Moses led because he was willing. Mary birthed Jesus because she was willing. Countless people heard about Jesus because Paul was willing. God might put you in a position to show someone they are worthy of love, to house someone, to feed someone, to support someone suffering from addiction... The possibilities are endless when we are willing to follow God with our hearts and our feet.

### **PRAY TOGETHER:**

*Pray that the Spirit would continue to transform you into a willing servant.*



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## Living Love: Weekly Practices

When you hear the word homework, you may think of more reading or busy work. But that's not what Lent is about! For the next six weeks, focus on what it means to be active in two specific ways: **prayer and practice**. The reason we gather at church and in small groups is so that we can be prepared to be sent into the world as agents of God's love, justice, mercy, and grace.

### Week 1

A great way to start loving your neighbor is with your actual neighbor. You don't need to go on a hunt to find people to love. They are around you all the time. This week, find a way to love your neighbor. Examples include giving them baked goods, introducing yourself if you haven't yet, bringing in their trash cans from the curb, or inviting them over for dinner. But don't just take our examples—be creative and show them that you care in a way that's authentic for you! (If you and your neighbor are already good friends, reach out to someone at work or another acquaintance.)

### Week 2

It's easy to love people who are easy to love and hard to love people who are difficult. Most of us have people in our lives who we don't love as we should because it's hard. They've hurt us, or they annoy us, or they push us away. Think about people in your life you haven't loved well. Take a step towards loving them this week. That might mean praying for them, apologizing, or catching up with an old friend you cut loose. When we love people when it's hard, we get a better idea of the love God has for us and calls us to give.

### Week 3

It's easy to write people off as bad or good. It's in our nature to judge and categorize, except there's one catch here. We aren't inherently good. We are broken people, yet we are loved despite our sin. Take some time this week to meditate on the reality of your sinfulness and the forgiveness God offers you. Afterward, connect with someone you have withheld forgiveness from and work towards healing the relationship. We forgive because we are forgiven.

#### **Week 4**

As we get older we tend to build more walls between ourselves and hurting people. We walk in the walls of our homes, drive within the walls of our cars, and work within the walls of our jobs. When we break out of those walls, or invite hurting people in, we have opportunities to care for people in need. Take some time this week to break out of your walls. Talk to a homeless person outside a supermarket. Go to a women's shelter and celebrate the residents you meet. Invite a stripper out to lunch and listen to their story. This is Jesus' way. Jesus lived without walls and without separating himself from hurting people. We can live the same way.

#### **Week 5**

A student in high school youth group recently answered the question "How deep does sin go?" by saying "deep enough that you just accept it." Sometimes the issue isn't fear, it's helplessness. Think about a large issue that faces our world, our country, women, minorities, majorities, youth, anyone. What is one small step you can take to enact transformation? Think local. Sign a petition, write a senator, pay someone's utility or tuition bill, sponsor a missionary, write a letter encouraging a police officer, partner with a mission in the inner city. We don't know where God is calling you, but the Spirit moves people towards freedom and empowerment. Don't let fear or helplessness keep you from fighting for those that need hope and advocacy.

#### **Week 6**

This is the last "homework assignment" and no one is going to check it. This isn't something for you to do this week as much as it is something for you to do over the course of a lifetime. You are called to love everybody always and to live out love in this world as Christ's diplomat. That requires action. Spend some time this week writing out a plan—feel free to include your spouse, kids, or friends—for how you can take steps to love generously without expectations.

Questions to help: What do I see God doing around me? How do I want to live love with family? At work? In church? At the grocery store? What missions or causes do I want to fight for? What sinfulness do I need to continually bring to God so I can be transformed by His love and grace? Who do I need to make a point of loving?