

PRAISE FOR *LOVE DOES*

“If this book does not make your heart beat faster, book the next flight to Mayo Clinic!”

Bill Hybels, Senior Pastor, Willow Creek Community Church
Chairman, Willow Creek Association

“Bob Goff is a one-man tsunami of grace, a hurricane of love. He doesn’t just talk about change, he really is change, as *Love Does* chronicles in such a vivid way. Yet, *Love Does* doesn’t leave you feeling like you want to celebrate its author, it awakens a sense deep within that you, too, have an outrageous role to play in God’s unfolding story or rescue and repair.”

Louie Giglio, Passion Conferences/Passion City Church

“An interesting and compelling story (with Young Life roots) that ends with a practical challenge and punch: ‘love does’ and God can use you to do it!”

Denny Rydberg, President, Young Life

“Every once in a while someone like Bob Goff shows up to remind us that some things matter a lot more than others. *Love Does* has a kind of ‘north star’ effect that will push you to refocus your life and energy on what is most significant. It doesn’t just invite you to respond with your God-given potential, it invites you to become a part of what God can do beyond your potential.”

Reggie Joiner, Founder and CEO of Orange

“We liked the book a lot. Mostly, the balloons on the cover. The rest was pretty good too. Lots of stories about how God helps us.”

Aedan, Asher and Skye Peterson ages 13, 12 and 9

“This may look like a book. It’s not. It is an invitation to enter into the greatest adventure you have ever known—your life as it was meant to be lived. Hang on!”

Michael Hyatt, Author, *Platform: Get Noticed in a Noisy World*
MichaelHyatt.com

“We really liked the book. Especially, the part about Tom Sawyer Island. I think it’s really cool how Bob takes things from real life and compares it to what God and Jesus do.”

Livi, Jonah and Ben Goodgame ages 11, 8 and 4

“I love this book!! Read it only if you dare to be inspired to have more fun, adventures, and the courage to live life to your fullest potential!! *Love does* delivers on so many levels—part memoir, part call to action, all spiritual journey, and so well-written you won’t be able to put it down.”

Darla K. Anderson, Senior Producer, Pixar Animation Studios
(and Bob Goff co-conspirator of many adventures and antics)

“*Love Does*—a book title and personal manifesto wrapped into one. Bob Goff just ‘does love,’ and on that path he sets others free to find themselves, to take courage, to make their mark, to pursue an adventure. Like all good books, *Love Does* feels like a conversation with the author—a real talk about things that matter. Goff’s book is a deep dive into a world with rough edges, where sentimentality and pithy remarks have no hold. The passages in *Love Does* stay close long after you turn the last page.”

David Batstone, President, Not For Sale

“I would steal Bob’s life if I could. His tenacious love of the unlovable, his courage to kick collective wisdom to the curb, and his infectious belief in what’s possible make him the man I want to be. *Love Does* is a beautiful and dangerous gift to all dreamers, misfits, and whimsy world-changers.”

Mike Foster, People of the Second Chance

“Bob’s ability to love people brings contagious hope and inspiration wherever he goes. The power of love showcased in this book will surely touch the hearts and souls of many people. Read *Love Does* and find a friend in one the world’s best hidden secrets, a person who shows how love can create connection and make a difference—even across oceans.”

George Tsereteli, Deputy Chairman of the Parliament of Georgia. (former Russian Republic)

“Bob Goff is an extraordinary man whose life illustrates that although we can’t all do everything, we can all do something. He is an inspiration to every person who wants to combat the urgent challenges facing our society.”

Nicky Gumbel, Vicar of Holy Trinity Brompton, London and pioneer of the Alpha Course

“There are some nasty rumors out there about treasure. Mostly that’s it’s buried and needs discovering. Or has to be mined. Or can only be located with a map and a big X. Not so, says the life of Bob Goff. Living from the center of your heart doesn’t have to be complicated or elusive. Love just wakes up in the morning and gets busy loving. The treasure is sitting right there next to the pancakes. About 5 pages in, I knew my life and I were gonna have words.”

Nicole Nordeman, Mother and Musician

L O V E
D O E S

DISCOVER A SECRETLY INCREDIBLE LIFE
IN AN ORDINARY WORLD

B O B G O F F



NELSON
BOOKS

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*This book is dedicated to
Sweet Maria, Lindsey, Richard, and Adam and the
posse of friends who have changed the way I see Jesus*

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FOREWORD

by Donald Miller

Bob Goff has had a greater impact on my life than any person I've known. And while you'll read stories in this book about adventures both big and small, it isn't bears or witchdoctors or dynamite that got through to me, though I confess Bob's adventures are intoxicating. The reason Bob has impacted my life is because he loves me.

Bob Goff loves people with a force that is natural, and by natural I mean *like nature*, like a waterfall or wind or waves on the ocean. He loves effortlessly, as though love packs annually in snow on a mountain, melting and rushing through him in an infinite loop. There's no explanation for a man who can love this well save God. I think Bob Goff knows God, and I think God's love flows through him.

I'm not alone in these sentiments. There are many around the world who have experienced the same love. What do you do with a man who will get on a plane and fly around the world to attend the wedding of a new acquaintance? What do you do with a man

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who offices at Tom Sawyer Island at Disneyland because angry lawyers are less likely to yell at him there, and for that matter, what do you do with a lawyer whose business card simply reads *Helper*? What do you do with a man who worked for two years to free a child from a prison in Uganda, all because I met the kid and asked him to? How do you explain the fact that he lumbers, pajama-clad, into his garden every morning to find a rose for his sleeping wife? And then there's the old lady who ran into his jeep, sending his body flying into the street to whom he also sent flowers. There're the DC diplomats, the new acquaintances to whom he daily sent pizza for a week, the Ugandan judiciary that he took to Disneyland, and the refugee camp outside Gulu where he dug wells and delivered pounds and pounds of clothes.

I don't know how to explain Bob's love except to say it is utterly and delightfully devastating. You simply cannot live the same once you know him. He will wreck your American dream and help you find your actual dream. He will wreck your crappy marriage and help you find a love story. To know Bob is to have a façade you've spent your life maintaining beautifully strewn to ruins while, like a friend, he comes alongside you as you rebuild.

Bob has offered to get on a plane on my day of trouble, called exactly when I needed him to, spoke a word of truth when I was being bombarded with lies, given me a family, given me a home, given me a vision for what can happen in a person's life when they are devoted to giving it away.

This book will be troubling for some. We don't like to put hands and feet on love. When love is a theory, it's safe, it's free of risk. But love in the brain changes nothing. Bob believes that love is too beautiful a concept to keep locked up behind a forehead like a prisoner.

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Those I've introduced Bob to, and there have been many, find it hard to put into words what is different about him. But the title of this book says it all. Where you and I may want love and feel love and say love, Bob reminds us that love does things. It writes a letter and gets on a plane. It orders pizza and jumps in a lake. It hugs and prays and cries and sings. Much of what we've come to know and believe about love doesn't ring true once you know this man whose *love does*.

What a privilege to introduce you to my friend Bob Goff.

Sincerely,
Donald Miller

INTRODUCTION

LOVE DOES

*I used to think I needed an office to be a lawyer,
but now I know all I need is an island.*

I do all of my best thinking on Tom Sawyer Island at Disneyland. There's a picnic table at the end of a little pier right across from the pirate ship. I suppose most people think this place is just a prop because there are a couple of wooden kegs marked "gunpowder" and some pirate paraphernalia hung over the railings. But it's not just a prop to me; it's my office.

All the times I've gone, I've never seen anyone sitting at my table on my pier or any real pirates on the pirate ship. I guess that makes them my table, my pier, and my pirate ship. Lawyers just decide stuff like that. While I'm willing to share my table

and my pirate ship, truth be known, I only want to share it with people who can dream. We all want to have a place where we can dream and escape anything that wraps steel bands around our imagination and creativity. Tom Sawyer Island is a place where I conspire with people, where immense capers have been launched, and where whimsy runs wild. The return address for many of the stories you'll find in this book is, in fact, that pier on Tom Sawyer Island.

What I like the most about Tom Sawyer Island is that it's mine. I'm a good sport about sharing it with other kids and visitors. But the whole thing is mine nonetheless. Something happens when you feel ownership. You no longer act like a spectator or consumer, because you're an owner. Faith is at its best when it's that way too. It's best lived when it's owned.

I have a season's pass to Disneyland and I can take a train there anytime I want. If I want to take a friend, I have an old classic motorcycle with a sidecar, a Harley-Davidson Springer Softail I keep in the garage for special occasions. It's the kind of motorcycle you'd see in a picture under the title "whimsy" in the encyclopedia. It's cool. It's blue and it's loud. I like riding it because I'm fully engaged while getting from here to there. I also like that I can bring a friend along as well. When I pass by people they smile because they've never been in a sidecar, but I can tell they wish they were the passenger. Whimsy is a lot that way—it needs to be fully experienced to be fully known. Whimsy doesn't care if you are the driver or the passenger; all that matters is that you are on your way.

Here's a strange truth I've noticed. Almost everyone knows about Tom Sawyer Island at Disneyland, but most people don't go. Maybe it's because it's surrounded by water and you have to

take a raft to get there. But it's really not that tough to do. Lots of people *want* to go. Some people even plan to go. But most forget or just don't get around to it. It's one of those "we'll do that next trip" kinds of places for a lot of people. Tom Sawyer Island is like most people's lives, I think: they never get around to crossing over to it.

Living a life fully engaged and full of whimsy and the kind of things that love does is something most people plan to do, but along the way they just kind of forget. Their dreams become one of those "we'll go there next time" deferrals. The sad thing is, for many there is no "next time" because passing on the chance to cross over is an overall attitude toward life rather than a single decision. They need a change of attitude, not more opportunities.

There are no admission requirements at Tom Sawyer Island. It doesn't matter how tall or short you are, old or young, religious or not. There are no lines on Tom Sawyer Island; it can be whatever you want it to be. You can do countless things there. Most of them involve running and jumping and using your creativity and imagination. It's a place where you can go and just do stuff. In that way, it's a place that mirrors life well—at least the opportunity to do much with our lives.

From my office on Tom Sawyer Island I have a fantastic perch to look around and see how a sea of people live. Tom Sawyer Island isn't a ride. It's not just about distraction or thrills, and it's not the kind of place you go to be entertained either. It has all the potential you bring to it—nothing more, nothing less. To find out just how much that is, all you have to do is show up. You don't need a plan; you just need to be present.

Somewhere in each of us, I believe there's a desire for a place like Tom Sawyer Island, a place where the stuff of imagination,

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whimsy, and wonder are easier to live out—not just think about or put off until “next time.” This is a weighty thing to think about on my island, but I often consider what I’m tempted to call the greatest lie of all time. And that lie can be bound up in two words: *someone else*. On Tom Sawyer Island, I reflect on God, who didn’t choose someone else to express His creative presence to the world, who didn’t tap the rock star or the popular kid to get things done. He chose you and me. We are the means, the method, the object, and the delivery vehicles. God can use anyone, for sure. If you can shred on a Fender or won “Best Personality,” you’re not disqualified—it just doesn’t make you *more* qualified. You see, God usually chooses ordinary people like us to get things done.

As I sit on my island, it becomes clear that we need to stop plotting the course and instead just land the plane on our plans to make a difference by getting to the “do” part of faith. That’s because love is never stationary. In the end, love doesn’t just keep thinking about it or keep planning for it. Simply put: love does.

CHAPTER 1

I'M WITH YOU

*I used to want to fix people,
but now I just want to be with them.*

When I was in high school, I met a guy named Randy. Randy had three things I didn't have: a Triumph motorcycle, a beard, and a girlfriend. It just didn't seem fair. I wanted all three in ascending order. I asked around and found out Randy didn't even go to the high school; he just hung out there. I had heard about guys like that and figured I should keep my distance, so I did. Later, I heard that Randy was a Christian and worked with an outfit called Young Life. I didn't know much about any of that stuff, but it helped explain the beard and made it okay that he was hanging out at the high school, I guess. Randy

never offered me a ride on his motorcycle, but he tried to engage me in discussions about Jesus. I kept him at arm's length, but that didn't seem to chill his interest in finding out who I was and what I was about. I figured maybe he didn't know anyone his age, so we eventually became friends.

I was a lousy student and found out I could take a test to get a certificate that was the equivalent to a high school diploma. I couldn't figure out how to sign up for the test, though, which on reflection was a pretty good indicator that I should stay in high school. My plan was to move to Yosemite and spend my days climbing the massive granite cliffs. At six feet four inches and two hundred and twenty pounds, I didn't really have a rock climber's build. I wonder what made me think there was a rock climber in me? When you are in high school, you don't give much thought to what you can't do. For most people, that gets learned later, and for still fewer, gets unlearned for the rest of life.

At the beginning of my junior year, I decided it was time to leave high school and make the move to Yosemite. I had a down vest, two red bandanas, a pair of rock climbing shoes, seventy-five dollars, and a VW Bug. What else did I need? I'd find work in the valley and spend my off-time in the mountains. More out of courtesy than anything, I swung by Randy's house first thing on a Sunday morning to say good-bye and to let him know I was leaving. I knocked on the door and after a long couple of minutes Randy answered. He was groggy and bedheaded—I had obviously woken him.

I gave him the rundown on what I was doing. All the while Randy stood patiently in the doorway trying his best to suppress a puzzled expression.

"You're leaving soon?" he asked when I had finished.

“Yeah, right now, actually,” I said as I straightened my back and barreled my chest to show I meant business. “Look, Randy, it’s time for me to get out of here. I just came by to thank you for hanging out with me and being a great friend.”

Randy kept his earnest and concerned face, but he didn’t say a word.

“Oh, hey,” I inserted, “will you tell your girlfriend good-bye for me too, you know, when you see her next?” Again, no words from Randy. He had this weird, faraway look on his face like he was looking right through me. He snapped back into our conversation.

“Hey, Bob, would you wait here for a second while I check something out?”

“No sweat, Randy.” I had nothing but time now; what did I care?

Randy disappeared for a few minutes into the house while I stood awkwardly on his porch with my hands in my pockets. When he came back to the door, he had a tattered backpack hanging over his shoulder by one frayed strap and a sleeping bag under his other arm. He was focused and direct. All he said was this: “Bob, I’m with you.”

Something in his words rang right through me. He didn’t lecture me about how I was blowing it and throwing opportunities away by leaving high school. He didn’t tell me I was a fool and that my idea would fall off the tracks on the way to the launchpad. He didn’t tell me I would surely crater even if I did briefly lift off. He was resolute, unequivocal, and had no agenda. He was with me.

Despite the kind gesture, it was pretty odd to think he wanted to come along.

“Um, sure, I guess,” I said halfheartedly. “You sure?”

“Yeah, Bob, I’m in. If you wouldn’t mind, what if I caught a ride with you?” Randy stood with a determined look.

“So, let me get this straight. You want to drive to Yosemite with me—right now?”

“Yep, that’s right. I can find my way back after we get there and you get settled in.”

I’m not sure why I accepted Randy’s generous self-invitation. I guess it’s because it caught me totally off guard. No one had ever expressed an interest in me like that before.

“Sure . . . ,” I stammered as we both stood awkwardly on his stoop. “Uh, I guess we should get going then.”

And with that, Randy closed the door to his little house and we walked side by side to my VW Bug. He plopped into the passenger seat and threw his stuff on top of mine on the backseat.

We got to Yosemite before nightfall, and it occurred to me for the first time we had no place to stay. We had a couple of sleeping bags, no tent, and very little money, so we snuck in through the back of a platform tent set up at one of the pay-per-night campsites. We slept toward the back so we could make our escape if an upstanding tent-renter showed up for the night. Fortunately no one came, and the next morning we woke up to a chilly but glorious morning in Yosemite Valley. To the north of us, El Capitan soared three thousand feet straight up like a huge granite soldier. Half Dome dominated the landscape to the east. These were my companions; this was my cathedral. I was in the valleywide living room of my new home. Now it was time to get a job and settle in. I rolled over in my sleeping bag, thinking about how great it was to have Randy with me. I was a little nervous but also excited about my newfound freedom. I was a man now. I felt my

chin for any sign of whiskers. Nothing yet, but I shaved anyway, just in case.

Randy and I dusted off the stiffness that comes with tent camping and went to the Camp Curry company cafeteria. I thought I could get a job flipping pancakes in the mornings, which would leave the rest of the day to climb. I finished the job application in front of the manager, handed it to him, and he gave it right back, sternly shaking his head no. He didn't even pretend to be interested, but I was secretly thankful he at least humored me enough to let me apply.

No matter. Undaunted, I went to one of the rock climbing outfitters with a storefront in the valley. I told them I'd do whatever they needed. I was sure that what I lacked in experience I could make up for by what I lacked in maturity or raw intelligence. They said that they didn't have any work for me either and that jobs were tight and almost impossible to get in the valley. I walked out of the store discouraged and looked at Randy, who was leaning against the VW. Rather than feeding my discouragement or saying "I told you so," Randy fed my soul with words of truth and perspective.

"Bob, you can do this thing if you want. You have the stuff it takes to pull it off. These guys don't know what they're missing. Let's try a few more places."

And then, just like he had said the day before on his porch, Randy reiterated his statement: "Either way, Bob, I'm with you." His words gave me tremendous comfort.

I applied at nearly every business in the valley and struck out every time. There were simply no jobs available and no hope of one opening up soon.

The evening approached as the sun sank low in the hills. It

was one of those sunsets displaying the kinds of vibrant colors that would have made a painter's canvas look overambitious. But I was still heartened: this sunset was real, I was in Yosemite, my friend was with me, and I still had a shot at my dream.

Randy and I headed back to the campsite and snuck into the same tent we had commandeered the night before. I didn't sleep well or long as I sorted through my very short list of options. There was no work, I had no money, I was a high school dropout, Randy snored, and I had to go to the bathroom. That about covered my list of problems from least to greatest.

The next morning came with a crispness that only fueled my anxiety. Randy stirred next to me in his sleeping bag, gave a couple phlegm-filled coughs, and said in a much-too-cheery voice, "Let's go climb some rocks!" We headed to the foot of one of the monolith cliffs and bouldered for a couple of hours, talking trash to each other about who was the better climber. By midday, we headed back to the valley to see if any businesses had miraculously decided to expand their operations overnight. It felt like the shop owners had quietly met somewhere when they learned that I was arriving in the valley and were conspiring against me to dash my dreams. The same rocks I had come to climb were now beginning to look like barricades. I applied at the remaining small storefronts I hadn't tried the day before. Do I even need to waste my breath to tell you what happened?

Randy and I sat on the front bumper of my VW Bug and leaned back against its flimsy and slightly rusted hood that buckled slightly under our weight. The sun was getting low in the valley again, and the granite cliffs I'd hoped to count as neighbors were casting long, dark shadows on the ground, each of the deepening shadows pointing toward the road exiting the valley.

I only had a few bucks left after buying gas, and Randy offered to spring for dinner. As we walked back out to the car after eating, I turned to Randy and said, "You know, Randy, you've been great coming with me and everything, but it looks like I'm striking out. I think what I'll do is head back and finish up high school." After a short pause, Randy said again what had become a comfort to me throughout the trip: "Man, whatever you decide, just know that either way I'm with you, Bob."

Randy had been with me, and I could tell that he was "with me" in spirit as much as with his presence. He was committed to me and he believed in me. I wasn't a project; I was his friend. I wondered if maybe all Christians operated this way. I didn't think so, because most of them I had met up until that time were kind of wimpy and seemed to have more opinions about what or who they were against than who they were for. Without much more discussion, Randy and I exchanged a silent look and a nod, which meant we were done. Without a word spoken, I hopped in the driver's seat of the car, Randy hopped in the passenger seat, and we followed the path cast from the long shadows the day before. I was going back.

We didn't talk much as we left Yosemite Valley or for much of the way home, for that matter. A dream of mine had just checked into hospice, and Randy was sensitive enough to know I needed some margin to think. We drove for five or six quiet hours. Every once in a while, Randy would check on me in his confident and upbeat voice. "Hey, how are you doing, Bob?"

We pulled down some familiar streets and into Randy's driveway. There was another car in the drive next to Randy's that looked like his girlfriend's. She visited often. We walked up to the front door and he opened it. I walked in behind Randy

uninvited, but somehow I still felt welcome. On the floor, I noticed a stack of plates and some wrapping paper, a coffeemaker, some glasses. On the couch there was a microwave half in a box. I didn't understand at first. Had Randy just had a birthday? Was it his girlfriend's? A microwave seemed like a weird way to celebrate someone's arrival into the world. I knew Randy wasn't moving because there wouldn't be wrapping paper. Then, from around the corner, the other half of this couple bounded out and threw her arms around Randy. "Welcome home, honey." Then the nickel dropped.

I felt both sick and choked up in an instant. I realized that these were wedding presents on the floor. Randy and his girlfriend had just gotten married. When I had knocked on Randy's door on that Sunday morning, Randy didn't see just a high school kid who had disrupted the beginning of his marriage. He saw a kid who was about to jump the tracks. Instead of spending the early days of his marriage with his bride, he spent it with me, sneaking into the back of a tent.

Why? It was because Randy loved me. He saw the need and he did something about it. He didn't just *say* he was for me or with me. He was *actually* present with me.

What I learned from Randy changed my view permanently about what it meant to have a friendship with Jesus. I learned that faith isn't about knowing all of the right stuff or obeying a list of rules. It's something more, something more costly because it involves being present and making a sacrifice. Perhaps that's why Jesus is sometimes called Immanuel—"God with us." I think that's what God had in mind, for Jesus to be present, to just be with us. It's also what He has in mind for us when it comes to other people.

The world can make you think that love can be picked up at a garage sale or enveloped in a Hallmark card. But the kind of love that God created and demonstrated is a costly one because it involves sacrifice and presence. It's a love that operates more like a sign language than being spoken outright. What I learned from Randy about the brand of love Jesus offers is that it's more about presence than undertaking a project. It's a brand of love that doesn't just think about good things, or agree with them, or talk about them. What I learned from Randy reinforced the simple truth that continues to weave itself into the tapestry of every great story:

Love does.

CHAPTER 2

SNIPER FIRE

*I used to think I had to act a certain way to follow God,
but now I know God doesn't want us to be typical.*

I heard about Jesus for the first time when I was in high school from a guy named Doug, who I used to shoot BB guns with. We would go out in the woods by a reservoir and shoot at cans and old car fenders. Neither of us was a very good shot and we rarely hit what we aimed for, so we just called whatever we hit the target. There are a lot of people who still do that. Being in the woods and armed makes a fifteen-year-old feel like he has chest hair. The prospect of losing an eye also kept us coming back. It's not necessarily a guy thing—well, actually, yes. It's a guy thing.

One day, Doug's BB gun broke and he got a pellet gun. I

wanted to have a pellet gun too, but I couldn't find someone to hook me up with one, so I kept using my old gun I got when I was eight years old. There was a big difference between Doug's legit pellet gun and my crummy BB gun. My gun didn't shoot very far or very well. After it was cocked once, it could almost shoot across the room. That is, unless a fan was on, then only about half that distance. It did have a slot where you could put a couple of drops of oil that would turn into a little puff of blue smoke when you pulled the trigger. Despite this fun little feature, mine was no match for Doug's gun, and we both knew it. Doug's pellet gun shot like a real gun too. He could pump it up what seemed like an unlimited number of times, and we imagined it could pierce steel. He put a huge scope on the barrel and then put camouflage on the gun, mostly made of old socks painted green and some weeds. It was an awesome piece of firepower compared to my Daisy BB gun, even though mine had blue smoke and his didn't. I thought I'd save up for a pellet gun like Doug's and maybe a rifle rack too. Yes, definitely a rifle rack.

One lazy afternoon, Doug and I were walking side by side along a trail in the woods. I was looking for new cans to shoot or ones to finish off we'd only wounded the week before. Suddenly I noticed Doug wasn't at my side any longer. I looked to the left and right, but Doug was nowhere to be found. When I looked behind me, however, I saw the muzzle of Doug's pellet gun pointing at me from behind a tree, half a green sock hanging from the scope, which was up to his eye. I had become the next tin can, and I did what any hardened gunslinger would do—I ran. As I ran, I cocked my Daisy BB gun with the blue smoke and just over the rise in the hill I turned to defend myself. But before I could get a round off, Doug pulled his trigger and shot me right in the belly.

Doug must have pumped up his gun twenty times or more, because I fell to my knees, looked down, and there was a hole and some blood where the pellet went through my shirt and inside of me. We were both pretty surprised and wonderfully amazed at the same time. We had just become one of those stories you hear about. Doug prayed for me and told me not to walk toward the light. I told Doug he could have my bicycle if I didn't make it. We put gum and leaves over the hole to stop the bleeding and made our way back to Doug's bedroom to get some tweezers and get the pellet out. We splashed some Scope mouthwash on the hole to clean it, then dug in with the tweezers and got the pellet. He awarded me a purple heart, I gave him a sniper medal, and we vowed to go back and shoot at each other as often as we could.

I liked how Doug did life. He was full of adventure and always had some wonderful mischief in mind. Sitting on the edge of Doug's bed laughing about the day, Doug began telling me the story about another man of adventure named Jesus, who lived a long time ago. Like Doug, Jesus wasn't a religious guy. To me, Jesus sounded like an ordinary guy who was utterly amazing. He helped people. He figured out what they really needed and tried to point them toward that. He healed people who were hurting. He spent time with the kinds of people most of us spend our lives avoiding. It didn't seem to matter to Jesus who these people were because He was all about engagement. That's one of the things I saw in Doug. I liked that Doug could be friends with Jesus and still shoot pellet guns. I didn't think that was allowed, but apparently it was.

I don't have one of the harrowing stories you sometimes hear when someone describes his initial encounter with Jesus. I wasn't on drugs, I hadn't committed any felonies, and I hadn't been

in jail. I hadn't had much exposure to religion, and what I did know, I didn't particularly understand. There was something about Communion and something about Sunday school, and whatever the question was, Jesus was supposed to be the answer. There was also something about studying the Bible with a bunch of guys on Wednesdays, which sounded weird because I thought you were supposed to read it and do what it said, not just study it. Maybe there was a workbook that went with it. All I knew of faith were fragments and shards of various traditions, but I hadn't ever heard the whole story about who Jesus was and what He wanted the world to know about Him. Despite my lack of prior knowledge, when my sniper friend Doug told me the whole story, it made a lot of sense.

I think it was more about what I saw in Doug than what he had to say to me. In fact, until we were in his room in post-op, we hadn't talked about Jesus much at all. Still, I knew Doug had something I wanted. I never wanted religion. I didn't understand it and didn't particularly want to either. To be honest, I thought being religious was for wimpy guys who didn't get into mischief. Though Doug wasn't a good shot (or he was a great one, depending on how you look at it), he wasn't a wimp and he seemed to know a person—a real, living God who liked him and even loved him even though Doug was as screwed up as I was. Because of Doug, I believed in this God, and I wanted to know Him too. I believed that Jesus wasn't just so much blue smoke to make religion seem like the real thing. He *was* the real thing, and He had a lot of firepower.

I'm in my fifties now and I don't run around in the woods playing with BB guns. That's way too tame. I have a playful spirit, but I'm also a lawyer and have ties and suit jackets in the

same closet that holds my now-rusty BB gun. At times I'm struck by how strange it is that the same person who has gone through so many life changes over the years can believe in this God who is still the same because He never changes. And it's even stranger because I have a legal mind and I spend my time proving things for a living. It's very hard to prove God, yet I still go on believing. I have an overwhelming sense of gratitude as I get older because I can see, both through the good times and the bad times, that God has been with me.

Because I'm a lawyer and a follower of Jesus I'm occasionally asked by people about my religion. I'm not always sure what they hope to learn from me, and the first thing I tell them is that they probably shouldn't be talking to me. I don't validate my faith with a church attendance scorecard. I think of church as a vibrant community of people consisting of two or more of varied backgrounds gathering around Jesus. Sometimes they are at a place that might have a steeple or auditorium seating. But it's just as likely that church happens elsewhere, like coffee shops or on the edge of a glacier or in the bush in Uganda. All of these places work just fine, I suppose. When it's a matter of the heart, the place doesn't matter. For me, it's Jesus plus nothing—not even a building.

When my friends ask about my faith, I tell them that a long time ago my friend Doug told me about Jesus and said I could know Him. I didn't start believing in Jesus just because Doug had shot me. But I've never stopped believing in Him even though I've caught some sniper fire from some religious people since then. There's a passage in the Bible that says people who haven't met Jesus are going to think the people who have met Jesus are crazy. I get that look sometimes, and it's usually from people who don't have a lot of creativity or haven't experienced

whimsy or haven't played with BB guns or been shot once or twice. The people who slowly became typical have the greatest problem wrapping their minds around a dynamic friendship with an invisible, alive God.

There's nothing wrong with being typical, I guess, but there is nothing fundamentally right about it either. I've never read in Genesis that God created "typical" and called it good. Instead, I think men who were bored made up *typical* and called it, if not good, at least acceptable. People who follow Jesus, though, are no longer typical—God is constantly inviting them into a life that moves away from typical. Even if they have normal jobs, live in normal houses, and drive normal cars, they're just not the same anymore.

The ones Jesus first picked to follow Him started out typical, to be sure. They were unschooled and ordinary. Fishermen, businesspeople, blind people, loose women, rip-offs, and vagrants. They were people who were lousy shots like me and Doug, folks who had been injured in life and patched together with gum and leaves and grace. But like my BB gun, what Christ-followers lack in velocity, they make up for in intensity. They are people who have experienced an intensely intimate friendship with Jesus and move forward with an intensity to parallel that experience.

Jesus lets us be real with our life and our faith. Maybe my BB gun doesn't shoot as far as the next guy's. That used to matter to me, but it doesn't matter to me anymore. What Jesus said we could do is leave typical behind. We could leave all of the comparisons and all of the trappings and all of the pretending of religion. Jesus told the people He was with that it's not enough to just look like you love God. He said we'd know the extent of our love for God by how well we loved people.

LOVE DOES

Doug and I are still friends. I send him text messages once in a while to see how he's doing and to find out if he's shot anyone lately. I'm not that great at spelling and thankfully my phone autocorrects the words I type for me. What I've noticed, though, is that almost every time I type in the word *love*, it gets changed to the word *live*. It's kind of a reminder to me of one of the things I learned from Doug about following Jesus. I learned that fully loving and fully living are not only synonymous but the kind of life that Jesus invited us to be part of. And because of that, our lives don't need to be just puffs of blue smoke anymore.