

Love Does, Session 2: FREE TO FAIL

We are no longer defined by our failures. We are defined by Christ.

Further explore the challenge of Love Does by engaging in any or all of the following activities between sessions. This part of Love Does is not about following rules or doing your homework. The following activities are designed to give you the opportunity to jump into the risk of God's kingdom with both feet.

DO: FAIL...ON PURPOSE

Bob talks about how our failures become opportunities for God to break pieces off of us so there's more for Him to work with. This week you're going to give God some new raw material.

One of the deep, inner dynamics of experiencing the love of God is recognizing when you are in a place of failure and receiving love right then and there. This is hard to do. When we fail, we want to judge (ourselves or others), get angry, or make excuses to protect our hearts. We end up only doing things we already know we'll be good at so we don't have to experience struggle. What if, instead, we *intentionally* put ourselves in a place of failure and then practice keeping our heart open toward God and receiving His love? Here's how this works:

Think of an activity you know you're not very good at or is a challenge for you. Some suggestions are listed here, or you can pick your own:

- Take an online workout class that you don't normally do.
- Follow a Do-It-Yourself YouTube video and try a new craft project, home improvement project, or skill (origami, anyone?).
- Write a poem and read it aloud to another person (or post it to social media!).
- Other: _____

A little advice: Don't choose an activity that could have serious consequences or is foolish like running a marathon with no training!

Once you determine your activity, pick a time this week, say a prayer, and do it. It will likely be frustrating, difficult, and possibly embarrassing. However, try to stay open to God's love, remember your new "Jesus nickname," and see what happens.

Reflection Questions:

- What was the experience like?
- What was your initial impulse when the going got tough?
- Was it easy or difficult to receive the love of God in the midst of failure?
- How might this lesson be transferable to other areas of your life?

REFLECT: MAKE IT RIGHT

Continuing in Jesus' Sermon on the Mount, read Matthew 5:21-26 (NRSV):

21 "You have heard that it was said to those of ancient times, 'You shall not murder'; and 'whoever murders shall be liable to judgment.' **22** But I say to you that if you are angry with a brother or sister, you will be liable to judgment; and if you insult a brother or sister, you will be liable to the council; and if you say, 'You fool,' you will be liable to the hell of fire. **23** So when you are offering your gift at the altar, if you remember that your brother or sister has something against you, **24** leave your gift there before the altar and go; first be reconciled to your brother or sister, and then come and offer your gift. **25** Come to terms quickly with your accuser while you are on the way to court with him, or your accuser may hand you over to the judge, and the judge to the guard, and you will be thrown into prison. **26** Truly I tell you, you will never get out until you have paid the last penny.

If you've been around Christianity for a while, you have likely encountered this teaching before. Jesus here expands the boundaries of what it means to love your neighbor as yourself. In the kingdom of God it is not sufficient to simply "not kill someone," because God's agenda is much bigger. God wants to heal the root causes of murder: anger, bitterness, the unforgiving human heart -- the dark emotions that gain emotional traction when we tear each other down. This is why Jesus links murder and slander. He is not content to leave us with a gospel of abstinence. Jesus' gospel is a gospel of action.

As the teaching progresses, Jesus exhorts His listeners to go and reconcile with “your brother or sister [who] has something against you” (vv. 23-24). Because God’s kingdom is about *active* goodness and not just *inactive* badness, it means that healing the human heart will take work -- our work as well as His. People who live out Jesus’ way will not just avoid slander but also be proactive in making broken relationships whole again.

Reflection Questions:

- Pray about your own relationships this week. Is God showing you a broken one that needs to be made whole? Which one?
- What is your “next right step” in working with God to heal this relationship? For example, can being the one to say “I’m sorry” first get the ball rolling?
- Finish this sentence: The thing that scares me most about this exercise is...

READ: “WEDDING CAKE”

Read Chapter 8, “Wedding Cake,” in the *Love Does* book.

Reflection Questions:

- Have you ever had an experience where God used your failures for something good?
- What is the difference between “believing the right stuff” and “doing the right stuff?”
- Bob says Jesus can use us “not when we’re broken, but because we’re broken.” And he notes that the only people Jesus couldn’t use were the people who were too “full of themselves or believed the lie that they were who they used to be before they met Him” (p. 57). Do you think Bob is right? Why does Jesus choose to use broken people?
- What does it look like to trust Jesus with your brokenness?