

HOW ARE YOU FEELING, MOMMA?

(YOU DON'T NEED TO SAY, "I'M FINE")



Authentic & Encouraging Psalm
Reflections on the Many
Emotions of Motherhood

SHELBY SPEAR
JESUS GROUPIE

LISA LESHAW
MOSES DEVOTEE

How Are You Feeling, Momma? (You don't need to say, "I'm fine.") had me at its subtitle. As women—and especially as women of faith—the pressure to be fine...or seem fine...or say "I'm fine" always feels like it's hovering over our interactions. But as God speaks to us through the Psalms, He clearly gives us permission to express the full range of emotions He intentionally equipped us with when He created us! I love that Lisa and Shelby's book takes firm hold of this divine go-ahead and expands on it with an accessible "What am I feeling now?" emotional buffet. However you're feeling at the moment, Momma—from afraid to worshipful to something in between—you're not alone, and this reassuring resource offers proof of that from two beautiful moms who aren't willing to settle for "I'm fine" and don't think you should either.

Elizabeth Spencer, mom of one teen and one 20-something daughter.
Blogs at guiltychocoholicmama.blogspot.com

As a mother of six, reading *How are You Feeling, Momma?* is like sitting on my front porch with a couple of friends and having a much-needed conversation.

Laura Wolf, mom of six, ages 10 and under

This book is a delightful guide for mothers and grandmothers to reflect on the spiritual joys & challenges of motherhood. I enjoyed the two different perspectives, which bring alive the love of God through all the turmoil of motherhood and the world.

Sandy McLeod, mom of two, grandmother of three

Whether we identify as Jewish or Christian, as moms, when we open Scripture, we're reading the same Psalms. It's a beautiful thing to realize, as these women did, the way we apply the truths we read, in our home lives, our communities, and in our places of worship, are remarkably similar too.

Traci Rhoades, mom of one 11-year-old. Blogs at tracesoffaith.com

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**SHELBY SPEAR, Jesus Groupie
LISA LESHAW, Moses Devotee**

Two Moms, Two Faiths, Two Voices

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Lisa Leshaw is an ultra-liberal, Jewish, New York step-mom joining forces with a pro-life, Jesus-adoring, Ohio mom, Shelby Spear. On paper, these two would appear to be polar opposites. Ironically, their differences are the adhesive that binds them in this joint effort to give moms some spiritual uplift while in the trenches of motherhood. A serendipitous online encounter brought them together, and these two are living proof that despite differing views, backgrounds, and cultures, when it comes to God, all things are possible through love.

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Acknowledgments

To my hubby and best friend, John, whose selfless love, sacrifice, and service to our family created the opportunity for me to nurture our kids from inside the nest and work toward my dreams in the process. For my three precious kiddos—utmost models of love, compassion, and grace—who made me the woman I am today.

~Shelby

No one believes in me or puts up with me more than the Mister, so thank you, Stu Leshaw. You're a glorious partner and the perfect anchor to my kite. And to my kids, who are the root of my gray hair and who constantly melt my soul, I could not be more proud of you. And to Leslie Means and the Glorious Warriors from Her View From Home, your gifts transform women's lives. Mine Included. God Bless. WRITE ON.

~ Lisa

Foreword

Every mother will experience a plethora of emotions during her parenting journey. This extraordinary road we travel can be filled with an abundance of joy as we raise our children through all the ages and stages and phases of growth. But amidst the joy, there are also moments of feeling deep angst, fear, loneliness, sadness, discouragement, frustration, confusion, guilt, shame, and utter overwhelm that grabs hold of our momma hearts.

Although every mom will travel down a unique parenting road, there are common issues we all face, challenges we all encounter, and struggles we all endure. Being a momma is hard. The unpredictable roller-coaster ride full of emotional twists and turns and highs and lows can leave us depleted and defeated.

Talking about those raw and very real emotions can be uncomfortable and embarrassing. We may be fearful of judgment or rejection if we expose our true selves. And oftentimes, moms just don't have the energy to be vulnerable when we are constantly running in the relentless race of mothering.

So, when people ask how we're doing or how we're feeling, we often respond with a casual "*I'm fine.*" It's just easier not to go '*there.*'

But how do we manage those deep emotions that come from raising our kids? How do we best take care of ourselves? What do we do with those aches that come with motherhood?

I believe the greatest relief and the most powerful affirmation comes from connection. There is a universal bond moms experience, created through a mutual understanding of our profound love and a fierce passion for our children. When moms can have intimate and honest conversations with other trusted moms about how they are really feeling, restoration occurs.

It's in this book where you will find freedom from hiding, from holding in those true emotions, from having to keep it all together with a perfectly coined "*I'm fine.*" You can be real here. You can be you. You can reveal those sensitive parts and secret struggles as you realize you are not alone.

Shelby Spear and Lisa Leshaw have combined their writing gifts, their two walks of faith, and their generous love for helping moms to offer you much-needed nourishment through helpful advice, inspiring Biblical truths, and an intimate view into their own well-worn experience as mothers.

Soak it all in, dear moms. Each chapter will drench you in the grace poured from these pages and tend to those fragile pieces of your heart that need to be handled with utmost care. You will find revelation, redemption, and a refreshing dose of faithful inspiration as these two seasoned moms meet you exactly where you're at and offer you the wisdom and encouragement you need.

Remember that you were designed by the hands of a loving God for this mission of motherhood. He goes before you and prepares the way. He walks this glorious and exhausting road alongside you with His unfailing love.

Let Shelby and Lisa speak truth into your lives, blanket you with comforting reassurance, and spur you on with fortitude and faith.

Christine Carter

Mom of two teens ages 13 and 15, and author of *Help and Hope While You're Healing: A woman's guide toward wellness while recovering from injury, surgery, or illness*. Blogs at themomcafe.com

Introduction

A Note from Shelby

The simple question, “How are you feeling, Momma?” wins the prize for the most loaded inquiry in the history of all things wonder. As moms, we’ve concocted a gazillion ways to dodge and deflect the question to avoid giving an honest answer. A trite “I’m fine” keeps the heaviness of authenticity from mucking up our everyday living.

Yet, the truth is, beneath our facade are countless felt needs just begging for healing and resolve. Motherhood is full of competing emotions that sap our energy on the regular. We often choose to ignore our feelings because if we give them room to breathe, scary things can happen. One of which is a complete unraveling of all the ‘fake it until you make it’ holding us together. Who wants to risk coming undone when we’re already on ‘overwhelmed mother’ status? But trying to side-step our reality by not being genuine only adds to the emotional weight we carry because of the missed opportunities to unburden our heart.

The good news is God is ready and willing to listen to how we feel. He already knows our heart anyway. His presence never leaves us, which means the availability God has on any given day to hear our prayers, pleadings, worries, and fears is all of time and eternity.

Seems like the Hebrews took full advantage of this truth back in the day when you consider the Psalms. Turns out all the “*Why, God?*,” “*Why not, God?*,” “*When, God?*,” “*How, God?*,” and “*Are you sure, God?*” questions hanging in the air thousands of years ago still resonate in our heart space today.

The Psalms depict what the Hebrews felt at the heart level as opposed to other writings from the prophets who shared what the Hebrews thought. Therefore, we can consider the poetic Psalms the *heart* book—the *this is how I’m feeling down deep in my soul* book, the *real, raw, unwoven, vulnerable truth* book. In essence, the Psalms are a glimpse into the inner life of the person sharing—a testament to the hopes, joys, doubts, dreams, sorrows, and gratitude tucked inside their human heart.

How Are You Feeling, Momma? is a collection of 31 short reflections giving you a peek into the inner life of Lisa and I as we hone in on the myriad of feelings we’ve grappled with as moms over the course of many years. The emotions we dive into are universal to all of us. In each chapter, you will read two perspectives on a specific emotion and corresponding Psalm scripture. One captures the emotion from my experience as a mom and the other from Lisa’s vantage point.

We’ve been through the trenches, a combined 66 years of parenting/step-parenting/grandparenting between us. Rumor has it I’m still wandering around my house trying to find my three kids. Apparently, they left years ago because they grew up when I wasn’t looking. My oldest son is 25, middle son is 23, and my daughter is 21. Although I remain in constant denial of empty nest, my hubby of 25+ years keeps gently reminding me it’s time to let go. Lisa is a step-mom to a son and daughter, both in their early forties. Unlike me, Lisa accepts the changing seasons and embraces mothering from a distance with her beloved husband of 40 + years. But let’s be real here; she can only do this because she has six grandbabies: five boys and one girl, ages 6-16.

The thing is, we can’t avoid all the feels in mothering, but we can cry out to God for help and comfort in times of struggle. This is what Lisa and I have tried our best to do throughout

our motherhood walk. We don't have all the answers because we are imperfect humans doing the 'mom thing' as best we can, like the rest of you. The words you read in this book draw from our deep wells of inexperienced experiences in hopes of bringing relief to all of us. Our honest sharing is meant to inspire you to get real about your inner life and take comfort in knowing you aren't alone in how you feel.

We hope our transparency gives you the courage to be authentic and vulnerable with others —especially God! God made us for relationship. He made us from love to *be love* in the world. In the end, the greatest benefactors of our spiritual growth are our precious offspring. Let's get inside our heart and choose to be real for their sake, if for no one else. We can do this, sisters, because God's got this.

A Note from Lisa

It's not easy for a momma to admit she's struggling. After all, motherhood is supposed to be a glorious time, and we should be reveling in its glory. Many times, we are.

But what of the other times when we feel overwhelmed and close to our wits end? That's when we're stuck in the trenches and need a lifeline. The problem? We can't walk out of the house and take a respite because we're tired and overloaded. We can't ask the kids to take care of themselves so Momma can relax with a cup of coffee and a good book.

So, what can we do that fits into the reality of Motherhood while a toddler is clinging to our knee cap and the baby screams to be fed? We can grab *How Are You Feeling, Momma?* and rest it against the toaster while we're preparing mac & cheese. We can prop up these Psalms on the napkin holder and take glances while breastfeeding. We can coax the toddler to sit on the floor with her sippy cup while baby naps so Momma can read a verse or two to sustain her.

Sometimes it takes only a few words of encouragement to nourish our souls, to keep us going. Hopefully, you'll find those few words right here.

Lean in, Momma, and know we're with you in spirit and sisterhood. And here we'll stay.

One

Psalms for Afraid Moms

Lisa's Reflection

My son's little face was shmushed against the school bus window. Saucer-wide eyes stared back at me as I alternated waving like a crazy lady and blowing butterfly kisses. He caught one of the kisses and then began crying, just as the bus pulled away.

I continued waving until the bus turned the corner, then I dropped to my knees on the neighbor's lawn where the dam burst, releasing enough tears to water every inch. This was a milestone 'mom moment' as my first child left home to enter the grown-up world of Kindergarten.

But it could easily have been driving my car alone for the first time without me in the passenger seat directing traffic, or college drop-off when I set eyes on two sorority sisters ogling my little boy.

Capital F

Capital E

Capital A

Capital R!

I know. I know. We're supposed to give our fears over to God.

I do. We do.

However, if God mentioned this, He clearly has our number. He knows that fear and motherhood are synonyms. So how do I calm my fear and anxiety during motherhood moments that unravel me? I act like I've got everything under control—easy peasy!

I start with puffed up shoulders and some fancy swagger and accompany that air of fake confidence with the nonchalance of a worry-free woman.

It sounds as though I am lying to myself—not necessarily!

Kids call it pretending. Ever watch a 3-year-old slay a dragon? They pretend they are great warriors and PRESTO they ARE strong and capable, and the beast is buried.

Grown-ups call it "acting as if."

When we act as though we are less afraid, we can trick ourselves into believing it is true. Christopher Robin convinced Pooh that he was braver than he thought.

The Wizard of Oz gave the Cowardly Lion courage by making him believe that he had it all along.

Like a magician uses sleight of hand, I call it sleight of mind.

If you convince yourself that you can handle something, you can close your eyes and visualize it actually working.*

Well almost.

*Disclaimer: You have to practice this technique numerous times to be successful, though there's no time like the present to give it a whirl.

It's not a miracle cure. Only God can perform those feats.

However, it's a tool at our disposal that, when coupled with God's love, makes all the

difference in the world.

When anxiety was great within me, your consolation brought me joy.

Psalm 94:19 (NIV)

Shelby's Reflection

Renowned psychiatrist, Elisabeth Kubler-Ross says, "There are only two primary emotions: love and fear. All positive emotions come from love, all negative emotions from fear. From love flows happiness, contentment, peace, and joy. From fear comes anger hate, anxiety, and guilt... we cannot feel these two emotions together... they're opposites. If we're in fear, we are not in a place of love. When we're in a place of love, we cannot be in a place of fear."¹

Over the past decade, I've come to agree with her theory by noticing how love and fear operate in my life: *love* binds, and *fear* separates. Peace, joy, and contentment keep me bound to the present, grateful for my blessings. Anxiety, guilt, and worry push me out of the now and into an illusory future filled with panic and dread. The emotional power play in my mom heart took me by surprise. Although my insatiable love for my kids seemed like the driving force behind all my actions, it turns out fear can hold its own in manipulating my perspective.

In the past couple of years, my kids risked pointing out the ugly truth of my wayward parenting fears. They confided that although my intentions were formed in love, many times my intercession in their life was morbidly bereft of strength. My fearfulness was poisoning their ability to grow, accept failure, endure necessary suffering, and find their own way.

When we attempt to tackle our fears on our own by trying to control our circumstances, or in my case, pretend we are better equipped than God to manage our life, not a lot of things go right. Thinking our kids' success, security, well-being, and happiness depend on us alone is a lie. God is in control, not us. A recent fear war I had with my son brought this truth to light:

After college graduation, he accepted a gap-year fellowship opportunity to tutor math to high schoolers in inner-city Chicago—where murder rates are very high. Months before the job was to start, he was in a bar in Cleveland and just so happened to sit next to a Chicago policeman. My son asked for some advice on where to live, and the officer sternly advised him not to take the job at all—too high risk. I was sure the encounter was a blessing and a warning sign from God.

Um, not to my son. His response was, "Well if I die, I die. I'm not worried because I'm excited to see Jesus." He's 25. Enough said. My faith must pale in comparison.

So, I pretend prayed, i.e., worried and vexed for months, hoping my inauthentic, trustful surrender would change his mind. It was to no avail because my son forged ahead with his plans. Then, at the 11th hour, before he moved to Chicago, God showed up big with a safer opportunity. The gobs of energy I wasted on doomsday scenarios had nothing to do with it. God had a perfect plan in place all along.

Trying to do God's job when our skill-set pales in comparison will never lead to victory and often ends in hopelessness, depression, and debilitating worry—all of which prevent us from being our best for God and our children. But turning to God for comfort when we're afraid is always a move towards love. As Kubler-Ross said, "When we're in a place of love, we cannot be in a place of fear."

Turns out the Bible contains 365 verses with the phrase "fear not." God promises over and over to take care of us if we put our trust in Him. I've come to learn, through trial and error, we can take His sacred word for it.

...in God I trust and am not afraid. What can man do to me?

Psalm 56:11 (NIV)

Personal Reflection:

What is your biggest fear as a mom, and how has God helped you push through fears in the past?

Two

Psalms for Alone Moms

Shelby's Reflection

Perhaps one of the greatest oxymorons of all time is a 'lonely mother' when you consider the 24/7 demands of little people. But loneliness is real and hits all of us up for many reasons. Sometimes we feel alone because we've lost our identity in motherhood. Other times we're lonely because we've reached the empty nest stage. One of the worst feelings of isolation is when we pay admission to the *I'm the only one who* club. The only mom who screams at her kids, burns dinner, forgets the tooth fairy, or leaves a basement door open, resulting in a toddler plummeting down the stairs. (That'd be me. I might be the only one). Or we believe we are the only mom who fights neediness, depression, insecurity, resentment, frustration, anger. The only mom who has a child who is _____ or does _____. We run these scripts through our minds, isolating ourselves even further out of fear, shame, and remorse.

An even harder scenario is the single mom, or the mom who balances everything because her husband works seven days a week, or the mom whose spouse is sick and needs constant medical care. All situations produce heavy and tangible loneliness.

But we're never *the only one who* anything. There are thousands of moms out there struggling just like we are—feeling the same feelings, battling the same wars. When we dare to be authentic and vulnerable about our feelings, we'll find soul sisters ready to "me too" us into fullness and connection. I can't tell you the number of times I've gaped when finding out my experiences as a mom *aren't* unique. The ache of loneliness can evaporate in an instant when we find common ground with another.

Admitting our sense of isolation is no easy task. In fact, doing so can feel humiliating. This is where God comes in. If we cry out to Him first by saying, "*Look at me and help me! I'm all alone and in big trouble.*" (Psalm 25:16 MSG), we might find out God has the perfect friend or even a total stranger ready to meet us where we're at. He works wonders that way. All we need to do is be on the lookout.

Lisa's Reflection

Being a mom can sometimes be a lonely experience despite the beauty and glory of this role.

It seems contradictory to logic that we can feel alone amidst our children and all the daily routines that consume us, mind, body, and soul.

Yet have we not all found ourselves sitting in the middle of the living room rug on the verge of tears or well past the floodgates bursting open and wondering *why?* What's wrong with me? I have everything! I should be grateful for these miracles.

We keep these feelings to ourselves for fear that we will be judged. We hold on to the shame and guilt and never realize that the mom next door is sitting on HER living room rug contemplating the same feelings.

The vastness of our responsibility as moms could break us if we gave it too much thought.

So when we feel alone there are ways to combat the aloneness and ones I am certain are God-approved:

- Take a walk outside with your little ones, and smile at a stranger; it humanizes everything and causes an immediate change in perspective. You might well bump into

another lonely mom, and if you help her feel better, it helps you as well!

- Sing! God gave us a voice so we could rejoice, and there's no better way to lift your spirit than to burst out in song. Grab your childhood microphone (hairbrush) and let it rip! If the neighbor chooses to close her window to drown you out, even better.
- Look through a photo album, which is a scrapbook of your life and a glorious reminder of the miles you have walked to get here. It, too, brings perspective back into focus.
- Take a look in the mirror and say 'Thank You' to YOU for doing an extraordinary job under incredibly difficult and challenging circumstances every day. Isn't motherhood beautiful and so challenging simultaneously?

When you find yourself stuck in the muck of motherhood, in the trenches where we all have been, open your Bible and read Psalm 40:2 (NIV):

He lifted me out of the slimy pit, out of the mud and mire; he set my feet on a rock and gave me a firm place to stand.

Personal Reflection:

What is one action you can take today to feel connected?

Three

Psalms for Burned-Out Moms

Lisa's Reflection

This motherhood gig is exhausting.

Not the type of exhausting that comes from running a race or hiking a mountain.

This is the 'feels like you went 10 rounds with Joe Frazier,' except on an emotional, psychological, and spiritual level, not only a physical one. Surely anyone that has read the mom job description would have a hard time believing it requires the efforts of just one worker as opposed to 20.

So, when it reaches the point where you do not feel you have what it takes to go one minute more without breaking, how do you find the strength to go one minute more without breaking?

Imagine if 'Mom Burnout' was a legitimate diagnosis that permitted doctors to write prescriptions recommending long naps and staycations, home-delivered meals and massages for the tired aching bones!

Let's get past delusional and down to reality.

You're burned out. You're entitled. But you notice that no empathy cards are arriving daily in your mailbox. Every momma you know has visited this same trench.

Some wade in deeper than others on certain days, but all of us have experienced the muck of motherhood and felt burnt to a crisp. You're at the brink. You're about to lose it and *kaboom!*

Hello, God!

Really? Hello, God?

Yep! Hello, God!

And not a moment too soon! Motherhood does not afford us the luxury to stop what we're doing on a whim to regenerate, rejuvenate, and re-energize. We have to be able to chat with God while one baby hangs in a sling on our front, one toddler has hold of our left shin, one is battling to climb our right leg, and one is calling from naptime that her fish mobile stopped.

What's cool about talking with God is He hears us above the noise and chaos and in short, staccato sentences without commas or periods.

He gets the gist of our burnout status without us having to explain ourselves.

All we basically need to say is, "Hey, God, excuse me, but I have nothing left here."

Telling Him releases something from us. It gives us one extra breath or two. Sometimes that's all it takes to get us through—that and a few bites of chocolate with a sip of wine.

Because you are my help, I sing in the shadow of your wings.

Psalm 63:7 (NIV)

Shelby's Reflection

Mom burnout happens for countless reasons because, family life. Maybe God's to blame since He built moms with full-throttle, multi-tasking capabilities. When we need to get a million things done, we get a million and a half things done without even thinking. Problem is, it's a horrible superpower because instead of calling on God to revitalize our spent spirit, we

often let exhaustion spill over into the mix of everyday living, making us sick or super cranky or despondently delirious. Then all our family members need to beware because #Momisaraginglunatic.

Jesus said in His famous Sermon on the Mount, *"You are blessed when you are at the end of your rope. With less of you, there is more of God and his rule."* Matthew 5:3 (MSG) Just last week I said in my famous rant to the universe, "Really, God? I'll get more of you and your rule when I'm burned out at the end of my rope? I'm a frayed knot." Pretty sure I heard the Creator of the universe chuckle. Hmf.

As a survivor of 25 years of end of rope scenarios from raising three children all born within 42 months, I guess my cup does runneth over with the "blessings" of the first Beatitude. I was blessed when working from home and flying solo in taking care of my three littles while hubby worked out of town all week. Even more blessed when all three kids were in sports, in different leagues, with different game times. Apparently blessed beyond when trying to build a consulting business, serve at church, and manage three teens whose lives and emotions were sprouting in all different directions. At the time, you could have fooled me.

The struggle is real in trying to find more of God and His rule while crossing off an endless to-do list. How in the world do we fit in one more thing? The only solution I found was this: the more we stay *present*, the more 'clock time' is available. So, when we ruminate over yesterday or fret over tomorrow (or even the next hour), we consume time in dispensing mental energy, like depleting RAM on a computer. But when we are present in the *now*, focusing only on what's in front of us, we bend time in our favor because our mind is free of past regrets (yelled at the kids) and future worries (I'll never get all this done). The extra sand in the hourglass creates time for us to commune with God. Even a quick prayer can be enough to recharge us. Heck, even a simple, "Jesus, help me," can make all the difference in the world.

You've always given me breathing room, a place to get away from it all, a lifetime pass to your safe-house, an open invitation as your guest.

Psalm 61:3-4 (MSG)

Personal Reflection:

Is there something in your life you can eliminate right now to create some breathing space?

More About Shelby

Shelby is a sarcasm aficionado and sappy soul whisperer who fell in love with the man of her dreams at first sight. Soon after, she fell hard for Jesus after witnessing her hubby's beautiful faith in action. Together, John and Shelby have packed in 25 years of togetherness built on a foundation of LOVE. John will tell you his time with Shelby has been the best 16 years of his life.

Their three amazing kiddos filled their nest with laughter and love for over two decades. But to be fair, the years also included plenty of chaos, not to mention more tough stuff than should be legal. At least that's the complaint Shelby's had with God over the years.

Now Shelby sits alone in her empty abyss and writes words about her love for Jesus and all she's learned and had to unlearn along the journey of marriage and motherhood. You can find her musings on her blog at shelbyspear.com as well as in print at *Guideposts*. She's known as the first writer in the history of the publication to share a story about getting a tattoo—a transformational moment shared with her teenage daughter.

Online, Shelby is a frequent contributor to *Her View From Home*, *For Every Mom*, *Today Show*, and many other online sites. She just finished up her memoir about how Jesus uses everyday life to unmask, heal, and free your authentic self.

More About Lisa

Lisa is excited to be entering a new frontier in her life; meeting the eligibility requirement for Dunkin' Donuts senior discount. Because she's now a 'biddy,' she lives in the same attire as new Mommas: t-shirts and sweats for daily living and extravagant affairs.

She's ready to pursue a career in stand-up comedy if someone discovers she's funny. She's also ready to publish her children's book, *A Royal Mistake*, if someone discovers she's written it.

Lisa prays every day that the world becomes a more tolerant and accepting place. She hopes that each one of us will work towards making a lasting contribution to ensure this outcome.

When it's all said and done, Lisa's wish is that everyone walks with lightness, giggle easily, and land softly someday in the arms God.

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Notes

1 <http://www.awakin.org/read/view.php?tid=680>

2 Psalm 9:1 (NIV)

3 Psalm 28:7 (NIV)

4 Psalm 95:2-3 (NIV)

5 Psalm 106:1 (NIV)

6 Lewis Howes School of Greatness Podcast Ep 622: Bob Goff, Love Everyone Always