

**A Conversation with Maria Goff,
Author of *Love Lives Here: Finding What You Need in a World
Telling You What You Want***

Q. Love Lives Here is a beautiful book—and it's your first. Have you always written?

A. Oh, thank you! I have always turned to writing to express myself, even as a kid. It's hard for me to articulate my thoughts out loud. Writing is so much easier.

Q. When did you decide to write this book, specifically?

A. After my husband Bob wrote *Love Does*, many questions started pouring in for me, surprisingly, about what I thought of the book, what our lives and family together was like, what dating Bob was like, so I decided I should write a book to answer those questions.

I was also motivated by the fact that I know so many of us fall into the trap of listening to what the world says is a successful and meaningful life. I wanted to create and hold a space for people to reflect on their own lives and what they mean, away from the distractions of the world.

In *Love Lives Here*, I shared my own stories, and many of them were painful and grapple with extreme loss and childhood trauma, but I do not think I'm unique. Now that I'm in my 50s and can look back over my life and the people I've encountered whose stories I've heard, I think we all struggle with and desire the same things. We all want love, connection, and meaning.

I believe that God purposefully wants us to experience a lot and to learn from both the hard times and the good times, so I included it all.

Q. You say you don't think you're unique, but you do have a unique way of explaining common experiences and relatable feelings: your writing is poetic but also instantly accessible.

A. Thank you so much. I think that comes from my heart just longing to be relatable—that's my overriding desire. Of all the stories I could share about different things I've experienced or that Bob and I have done in our marriage, raising our kids, seeing the world, I handpicked the ones that I thought would be the most relatable.

I believe in the power of sharing a story. The point isn't the story itself, really, but to forge a connection between the teller and audience. I hope these stories pull us together.

Q. Before we go any further, for those who don't know, tell me a little more about Bob and what he's known for.

A. Bob is a tour de force! [laughs] Bob was an attorney for about 25 years, before founding Restore International, a non-profit created to help children who are victimized around the world. His book *Love Does* was a *New York Times* bestseller, and today, after serving as a U.S. diplomat and becoming Honorary Consul for the Republic of Uganda, he gives talks and continues to come up with crazy, brilliant ideas to help people. I am so grateful I get to help him make those ideas happen.

Q. You write about raising kids who are independent and embrace who they are, and it's so compelling. The passage about your three kids "running away" is distinctly different from just about every other parenting how-to available today—in such a great way. Why did you include that story?

A. [Laughing] That day, when that was happening, it was as if God was saying, "Pay attention." In all honesty, letting them follow through on their crazy idea to "run away" in our backyard was one of the hardest things for me.

As it was happening, I remember thinking to myself, "I can't let them run away. What kind of parent lets their kid run away?" But it was as if God was just with me, urging me to let it happen. It was almost like it played out more for me than the kids—I was re-learning through them what it looks like to have unbridled joy and believe that anything is possible.

Our kids came home at the end of the day with a great story to tell, and they were braver for the experience. In addition to reconnecting with the wild courage it takes to follow through on a crazy idea, I think we all need to be reminded that God is in control of our lives. When it happened 20 years ago, I didn't know this funny little story illustrating freedom, exhilaration, bravery, and faith would end up in a book I'd write someday, but I'm so glad it did.

Q. I love what you write about kids not being afraid of their ideas—and how they live in constant anticipation of what's next, not in fear of it. Now that we're grown, how do we get some of that back?

A. I love kids. They're just the best. It feels like we come into the world with the abilities to dream, believe, and not be afraid.

But this is a fallen world. Life is hard, and that reality can consume us. As adults, I think we can get that childlike eagerness and courage back only by going through inevitable hard things. When we push through pain, we're forced to develop "muscles" that help us be brave and strong. The more we face, the stronger we can get.

I also believe in God. That means I know that no matter what I go through, God is there. He promises he'll be with us the whole way. I believe that he's been with me during

every trauma—from childhood trauma to the fire that destroyed our family’s beloved lodge. He’s there through loss, grief, lost childhoods. Knowing that and trusting him makes me believe that I can do anything every morning when I wake up.

Q. You alluded to this a little bit when we talked about the kids running away—when you said, “Oh, Bob should be the one here for this, not me!” You explore how you and Bob are different in a wonderful way that doesn’t elevate one side over the other. I love this line: “If you feel like your ambition isn’t big enough because it’s not the same ambition someone you love has, don’t buy the lie and change who you are.” Can you talk about that realization a bit?

A. One of the biggest traps for people in any relationship, not just marriage, is the compulsion to compare ourselves with each other. Comparison can do so much damage to your self-esteem and self-worth, and it can tear relationships apart.

I know because I’ve been there with the comparisons. I found myself doing it early in our marriage because Bob is wonderful, and he’s also kind of everything I’m not, especially his energy level and creativity. As a believer in God, I’ve come to realize that there is a real enemy among us, and that enemy whispers lies: “Bob’s so much better than you. He has so many more gifts. He’s smarter than you.”

Early in our marriage, I was insecure and trying to heal from my own wounds. But, as I grew in my faith in God, I started to change. Bob also loves, adores, and cherishes me, and always called out my strengths. I believe God used him in that way.

I started to realize my life had value—that my gifts are just different. In the book, I talk about the relationship between a balloon and a string. Bob is the balloon—dazzling and adventurous—and I’m the string—anchoring and practical. They’re equally important, and together, they make a fun toy.

Figure out what your relationship is—what you make together. Then protect it, nurture it, and let it grow.

Q. You share your and Bob’s love story, and it’s so inspiring. We don’t hear enough stories like that today.

A. I’m glad it’s getting out there. I hope it encourages others. If there is one thing that I hope *Love Lives Here* moves readers to realize, it’s that whatever they’re missing in their lives right now is possible. I urge readers not to believe the lies the world feeds us: “It doesn’t matter, It can never be that good. It’s just a dream.” Those are lies. God can do anything in our lives.

Q. You write insightfully about the strength found in loss. We'll discuss what you have to say momentarily, but first: what was the Lodge?

A. The Lodge was our place in Canada that we built 20 years ago. It's in a remote area next to a Young Life camp called Malibu that can only be accessed by seaplane.

Bob and I met in Young Life, so it's very special to us. When we took our kids on vacation one year, we stopped in at Malibu. It was on this trip that we discovered that they wanted to give kids a videotape recapping what was often the best week of their lives, but they couldn't do it because they didn't have the budget or staff. We volunteered to start coming up every summer to handle that for them, and it was such a passion project for me.

One summer while we were there, news hit that the land surrounding the camp was going up for sale. Suddenly, we were concerned that someone could buy the land and disrupt the irrigation and the natural beauty that cradles this place.

At first, we decided to just buy the land and leave it alone so that the camp would be safe. But after we bought it, we realized there was this one little low path by the water, which is where you'd want to build a dock and cabin anyway for access. We planned to build a small cabin for us to use when we were up there during the summer, shooting videos. But Bob saw the potential for doing something much bigger, of course. We thought, "Okay, if we can build something bigger, how can that serve the camp? What does the camp need?" Well, they needed a place for their volunteers to rest. These young people come up for anywhere from three weeks to four months at a time, and the camp's remoteness ensured they had nowhere to go on their days off. That clicked with us. We thought, "What if we build a lodge large enough to accommodate up to 75 people at a time? What if we created a space where we could just love them and offer rest?"

And that's exactly what we did.

Q. It became legendary, didn't it? You have hosted all kinds of people there.

A. Yes. In addition to caring for the Young Life volunteers, we started inviting people who are on different front lines, trying to share their faith in whatever it is they do, whether it's writing music, producing movies, authoring books, running organizations—just people from all over the world whom Bob would meet or we'd just hear about.

We'd invite them up for retreats with a mix of people. We wouldn't tell anyone who else was coming. We would just invite them up not for who they are to the world, but for who they are to God. They'd come, rest, eat, and just be. There was something so beautiful in protecting the time and space of the people who would come. None of the attendees really knew each other before they got there, but by the time they left, they were genuine friends. It was fun. We did it for years.

Q. You write a lot in the book about loving people uninhibitedly, whether it's your kids, your neighbors, your family, or people you don't even know. Why?

A. Instead of feeling like we need to be stingy with love—like we're going to run out because we only have so many tickets at the carnival—we need to give it away freely. Don't wait for a plan or an invitation, either. Just do it.

Q. Tell me about the Lodge fire.

A. Last May, my son came over in the middle of the night because he was the only one who woke up when the call came: our Lodge was on fire. There was nothing we could do. It was in the middle of nowhere—there is no fire department to call.

The next morning, in shock, we figured out how to get up there quickly. A friend of ours who owns one of the seaplane companies picked us up at the airport in Seattle and flew us straight there. By the time we got there, the Lodge—all 7,000 square feet, three floors, furnishings, everything—was a smoldering four feet of ashes.

It was probably one of the biggest losses I've ever experienced. It felt like a family member had died. The Lodge had become something much bigger than all of us. We felt like stewards of a special place. It was so hard to comprehend that it was just gone. It still is.

Q. You write about a lot of painful experiences in this book—not just the Lodge, but childhood challenges, isolation, and insecurity, too. Can you talk a little bit about the strength you've found in loss?

A. The Lodge is the most recent thing that's happened, and I probably felt the most undone and weak as I have ever felt. I remember being on the floor sometime the next day or so after the news, and I was numb with such deep grief. I'd heard of people being "facedown before the Lord." Well, I was literally that position: on the floor, blubbery, sobbing, just emptied out with nothing left.

I believe that when we are in our lowest places, God comes in and does some of his greatest work in us and through us. In that moment, I didn't feel alone, I knew God was there. It was as though he was saying, "I'm sad too. But we're going to get through this together. I have plans for you, and I'm not giving up on those. You've lost something dear to you, but there will be more." God knows what it's like to lose something dear. His son Jesus was crucified. He isn't just with us—he's felt what we feel in an even deeper way.

Ultimately, the good news for me is that we are not alone, even when it feels like we are. When you're face down on the floor crying, God is there—just like he's there in moments of sheer joy.

Q. It's one thing to be facedown as you're going through something in real time. But you also write about the importance of reflection and diving past the surface of our past—truly dealing with it. Why?

A. It has to do with the juxtaposition hinted at in the book's subtitle—finding what we need in a world telling us what we want. The world is so good at keeping things on the surface, promoting stuff that's shiny and easier. I have found that when I dig deep and keep going, determined to keep growing, I discover a richness that is unmatched. As hard as it was for me to write and share some of the stories in my book, I know it's worth it. I've encountered God in the dark places, and indescribable beauty. By telling my stories, I can offer hope and encouragement to someone else—because when they reflect on who they are and where they've been, ignoring the debris and clutter, they'll find that beauty, too.

About Maria Goff

Maria Goff has made a career out of loving her family and neighbors, raising her children, and turning houses into homes. She is married to Bob Goff, whom she calls the most helpful and interesting man in the world. They've journeyed to Uganda and Northern Iraq to start schools for kids who are marginalized. They have three adult kids, who are starting families of their own. They live in San Diego, where she and Bob continue to dream about fun and adventures yet to be had with their growing family. Maria's first book, *Love Lives Here: Finding What You Need in a World Telling You What You Want*, will be available everywhere March 7, 2017.

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