



FATHER GREG BOYLE INTERVIEW
PORTIONS USED IN: *THE THREAD SEASON ONE*

Father Greg Boyle, Priest
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Interviewed by David Bender
Total Running Time: 1 hour, 12 minutes and 4 seconds

START TC: 00:00:00:00

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FATHER GREG BOYLE:

I'm Greg Boyle and I'm the founder of Homeboy Industries.

ON SCREEN TEXT:

Father Greg Boyle
Priest

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Father Greg Boyle

Priest

00:00:09:00

DAVID BENDER:



Father Greg is I know a lot of people call you or Father G. You quoted a seventh century prophet. I'm going to say it wrong of a cook about vision. I'd love to start with that quote, that and that citation and why that was important to you to talk about.

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FATHER GREG BOYLE:

Yeah. So the prophet Paavo Cook writes for The Vision still has its time, presses on to fulfillment and it will not disappoint. And if it delays, wait for it.

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DAVID BENDER:

Why is that so much a part of your personal philosophy? Because it seems to inform this this greater patience in working with the people with whom you work. Patience has to be not just a virtue, but a necessity.

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FATHER GREG BOYLE:

Yeah, I think the prophet how Cook speaks about a vision above all that will happen and and you know, come to be and so and it will be fulfilled. And so you you know you're you're waiting in joyful hope for that to happen. So it's you know and if you have a confidence that this will happen and that love will prevail or however you envision the vision, then it's it's easy to be patient with it and to wait. And and you wait for people to kind of come to their own sense of inhabiting their truth and love and and that takes time. And you just



cherish people into that consciousness where they see it and feel it and live from it.

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DAVID BENDER:

It seems to me that the essence of that is in believing that there is no such thing as a bad person. It's someone who hasn't yet seen their own goodness and seen the way that they should consider themselves. Do you believe that all people have a spark of the divine of goodness in them?

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FATHER GREG BOYLE:

Yeah. I'll answer that by telling a brief little story. I was at the L.A. Times Festival of Books. I was on a panel with a rabbi and a columnist and. And I was saying that the two principles that are kind of foundational that we hold here at home, boy, is everyone is unshakably good. There are no exceptions and we belong to each other and there are no exceptions. And then I asked the crowd, I said, don't. Do I think that all our vexing complex social dilemma that need our addressing would simply go away if we embrace those two foundational notions. And I paused and then I said, Yeah, I do. And the entire audience burst into laughter, which kind of startled me. And when the laughter subsided, I. I said quietly, Yes, I do. And I do. And I think gang members have taught me that for 40 years that that everybody's unshakably good. Now, there's some things that block the view, you know, despair that's dark or trauma that's enormous or real mental illness. But none of it touches



their goodness. Their goodness is intact. So the idea is, how do you how do you find it?

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DAVID BENDER:

You grew up in Los Angeles. Talk about growing up. You were one of eight kids.

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FATHER GREG BOYLE:

I was born in Los Angeles and I have five sisters and two brothers. And, you know, in effect, I was born in, you know, and lived in the gang capital of the world. But there was no chance that I would ever join the gang. I mean, I won all the lotteries, parents and zip code and education. And so there was no chance that I'd ever join a gang, but which has nothing to do with morality. More with location and being privileged. So, yeah. So I grew up in this city.

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DAVID BENDER:

Talk about your parents.

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FATHER GREG BOYLE:

Yeah. When my father died when he was 70, which was many years ago, maybe 30 plus. And my mother died just a handful of years ago at 92. And, uh, and they were terrific parents, you know, people of their generation, you



know, who, uh, expressed emotion. And and, you know, in a way that that generation did, which was strong and silent. You knew that you were loved, but there wasn't the kind of affection that demonstrable displays like like maybe were more used to in subsequent generations. But they were. They were kind of rock solid. Guiding lights.

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DAVID BENDER:

Were you raised in a faith based environment? Was the church important in your growing up?

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FATHER GREG BOYLE:

Yeah, we were two blocks from our parish church, and, you know, the ten of us would walk to church and it was like a Norman Rockwell painting, you know, it was like two by two and and, uh, yeah, with Sunday best and that whole thing.

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DAVID BENDER:

Where were you in the birth order?

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FATHER GREG BOYLE:

I'm number four out of eight.



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DAVID BENDER:

How was your growing up? There comes a time in life where you sort of see a path for yourself. You chose to pursue it. How did that happen? How were you drawn to it? How was it your calling?

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FATHER GREG BOYLE:

Well, I was educated by the Jesuits, so. And I found that they had this. Campbell Burger of. You know, joy and fearlessness. So they were hilariously funny and they were prophetic. Especially in those days. It was, you know, the Vietnam War. And so to watch them be so out there in terms of their protest. And I was drawn I entered the Jesuits in many ways because of Daniel Berrigan. I never knew him, but I, I remember seeing the trial of the Catonsville Nine at the Mark Taper Forum in Los Angeles. And and it was powerful. I thought, yeah, I'll have what he's having. And so that's kind of what happened. I mean, it's kind of superficial or but, you know, it grows into something deeper, of course.

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DAVID BENDER:

But when you decided that you were going to pursue becoming a Jesuit, a lot of this is training and time. And I know you have multiple degrees a degree in philosophy and English from Gonzaga. So you were studying philosophy, which is both divine and very secular. Did you know then that you were interested in the priesthood when you were.

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FATHER GREG BOYLE:

Well, I studied income's at Gonzaga and Loyola marymount during the time that I was a Jesuit, so I wasn't yet ordained a priest, so I was ordained in 84. So, you know, it was like ten years into ten, 13 years maybe can't remember into entering the Jesuits that you study philosophy, theology, and then you're ordained a priest. You know, being a Jesuit is kind of the thing for me. You can become a priest or not, you know. But, you know, following the charism of St Ignatius of Loyola, the founder of the judge, was that was the thing that drew me. And then priesthood is, you know, sort of an option, you know, that's contained within that other vow, that other vocation.

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DAVID BENDER:

So it's the Jerry Brown of it all. You were attracted to the humor and the fierceness. Obviously, Jerry brought those qualities into public life.

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FATHER GREG BOYLE:

Jerry's a friend. And so, you know, he's older than I am. So he entered at a different kind of time. But again, he entered the Jesuits, took vows as a Jesuit. And then and then you take first vows after two years and then you, you know, take final vows, you know, sometime later. But somewhere in there, usually 10 to 13 years in you, you are trained to then be ordained as a priest in the Catholic Church.



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DAVID BENDER:

And so you're an undergraduate and in graduate school still going through that process. That is. So it's part of the path. And this is to someone uninitiated. I, I didn't understand that part of it is learning all those things and then deciding what you want to do with it.

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FATHER GREG BOYLE:

Yeah. I don't know if there's so much deciding. You can decide to be a Jesuit brother, which is to say you don't get ordained to be in a ministerial capacity, but you kind of decide that at some point you go, Yeah, I want to be a Jesuit, but I, I don't really want to be a priest. So you can do that.

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DAVID BENDER:

You did decide you wanted to be a priest. Was there a moment? Did you have a pivotal moment where you knew that this was what you wanted to do?

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FATHER GREG BOYLE:

No. Most most folks who I entered with, they knew that that would be on the path. So. So you do the studies, you do the philosophy and theology. And. And then. And then you're ordained and then you're assigned somewhere.



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DAVID BENDER:

And were you assigned to Bolivia? Is that what happened?

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FATHER GREG BOYLE:

Well, I asked to kind of take a year to go learn Spanish right after ordination. So that's I was there for a year. And then I came back, finished studies, and then I was assigned to Dolores Mission.

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DAVID BENDER:

Tell me. I've read some, but obviously Dolores Mission was a location in Los Angeles. It determined a lot of the work that you were doing based on where it was next to the two largest housing projects. Is that right?

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FATHER GREG BOYLE:

Yeah. Well, you know, we had two parishes in Los Angeles that were administered by the Jesuits. So we'd been asked many years before if the Jesuits could come in here and do that. So it was the poorest parish in the city. Nestled in the middle of two public housing projects, Pico Gardens, Aliso Village and at it. And what later evolved, it became the place of the highest concentration of gang activity in all of Los Angeles. We had eight gangs in my parish initially. The first two years that was not so much an evident thing. But then by 88, it just heated up and I was burying kids.



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DAVID BENDER:

I saw at one point that and this is some time ago, I think close to 200. And I'm sure that number. This, I think, was from speech he gave a decade ago.

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FATHER GREG BOYLE:

Yeah. No, I'm I think I. 265. Where I am now.

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DAVID BENDER:

I'm struck, Greg, by the fact that unlike so many people who deliberately send young men and women off to war and never keep count, never keep track, have no idea these are people that you didn't send into this life, but you're very aware and you've kept each one very real to you. I'm just struck by that that you do know the count.

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FATHER GREG BOYLE:

Yeah, well, part of the reason I counted was because they didn't count. And so, you know, in the early days, it would be, you know, eight lives in in the housing projects were not worth one life in Westwood Village. And so that was becoming, you know, ever present and clear to me. So. So then that started this thing where I kept track and I have a book and I write the name and, and, and the number so that that kind of evolved over the years. But it



was at a time when I was shaking my fist, you know, so, you know, they had a gang related homicide in Westwood Village and near UCLA and a young woman on a date. And she got caught in the middle of of Crossfire, gang crossfire. Typically, you wouldn't have gang violence over there, but they did. And and the next day, you know, it was assignment of all sorts of patrol officers and detectives were taken from other cases in the city and applied to this case. And then a huge reward was offered. And then it became clear that one life in Westwood was worth, you know, eight, 16, 49 deaths in my parish.

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DAVID BENDER:

A white blond life.

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FATHER GREG BOYLE:

Yeah. Yeah. That they were worth more. And and it was like, this is what gang violence isn't supposed to happen in Westwood Village. But it did.

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DAVID BENDER:

As you saw this happening and you were shaking your fist at the fact that people didn't see the rooster crowing against the dawn. You did something about it. You created homeboy. What brought you to creating this entity that has grown so much to serve from the very beginning?

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FATHER GREG BOYLE:

Yeah, well, the first thing we did was we started a school because there were so many junior high middle school age gang members who had gotten the boot from their home school. Nobody wanted them. So in the middle of the day, they were wreaking havoc and selling drugs and writing on the walls and were violent. So. That was the first thing we did. That was kind of the pressing thing. So then I walked out to them and I would say if I found a school that would take you, would you go? And every single one said, Yeah, I would. And then I couldn't find one. So we started one. And so that's kind of how it evolved. It was a kind of an outreach to this population. And then and then they said, you know, if only we had jobs. And so myself and the women in the parish, which was the profile of housing projects, were basically women with children. And so we marched around the factories that surrounded the projects trying to find felony friendly employers, and that wasn't so forthcoming. So we just started things, you know, a maintenance crew, a landscaping crew, a crew to build our child care center, all made up of rivals, members of these eight different. And it became.

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DAVID BENDER:

Necessity being the mother of those.

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FATHER GREG BOYLE:

And we just couldn't wait, you know, for employers to say, hey, this is smart on crime. If we hired gang members. So we had a slogan in those days.



Nothing stops a bullet like a job trying to get employers. And the need was so huge. Every gang member wanted a job. Nobody said, that's okay, I'm okay doing this, you know? And even, you know, gang members who drove sold drugs, you know, you think, how are you going to keep them down on the farm after they made money hand over fist? And yet every human being wants their mom to be proud and their kids not to be ashamed. So it was not a tough sell.

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DAVID BENDER:

You told the story of someone named Bandit who was told and thought that he was good for nothing and finally just came around to being tired of being tired. And it seems like a lot of these kids have grown up not seeing and not having any way of seeing their own worth. That's the first challenge, right? Is getting them to see themselves the way perhaps the way that God sees them or the way that exists, that they just cannot possibly see it given their circumstance. So is that.

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FATHER GREG BOYLE:

Yeah. I mean, I had a conversation not long ago with a homie named Joseph, and I've known him since he was ten years old. He's now 45 or something. And, you know, his father was gang member. His father died of a heroin overdose. Joseph has overdosed many times and has never died from it. But so we were finishing a conversation and he says. You know, I think life is just letting the blind fall. Fall. And removing the blindfold, he said. I think it's just



removing the blindfold. And I said, Well, what do you see? You know, when the blindfold falls. And he thought for a second he put his hand on his chest and he said, Goodness. And that's the whole idea. You know, we're allergic around here to holding the bar up and asking folks to measure up. You know, we just we want to show up to them with a mirror and say you're exactly what God had in mind when God made you. There's nothing missing here. And once they know that truth, they become that truth. They inhabit that truth. And indeed, no bullet can pierce it.

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DAVID BENDER:

You have a phrase the soul that can feel its own worth when when you allow it to.

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FATHER GREG BOYLE:

Yeah. I mean, it's a it comes from a Christmas carol, you know? Long live the world in sin and error pining till he appeared in the soul felt its worth. And so it's about Jesus and it's about Christmas. But it's really the job description of human beings, you know, who own the polls. You know, you appear and the soul feels its worth and. And so you're not fixing, rescuing or saving. You're you're actually, in a counterintuitive way, you're allowing yourself to be reached by people on the margins and you allow your heart to be altered. And just by that kind of attention and cherishing, then then people see what you're seeing. You know, it's a lens. And then they they live from their truth. They let love live through them. They find their true selves and loving. So and



you're doing it in each other's presence. So it's not a thing that you transfer to somebody. It's something that happens in an exquisitely mutual way. And then people, everybody's inhabiting their own dignity and nobility in each other's presence. So it's not a thing I impart to somebody, but it's a thing that together we reveal and then they see it.

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DAVID BENDER:

I'm struck by how you have said that over and over again, that you don't rescue people, you don't fix people, you don't pull people out of gangs. You stand with them. And in fact, you are by being with them in some way, you are more whole as a result of that. And I don't want to paraphrase you, so please say if I've got that right. Is that how you see.

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FATHER GREG BOYLE:

Yeah. I mean, so you talk about the margins, the poor, the powerless, the demonized, the voiceless, the easily despised, the readily left out all those people who are at the margins and you go to the margins not to make a difference, which is in every commencement address I've ever heard, you go to the margins so that the folks at the margins make you different. If you go to the margins to make a difference, then it's about you and it just can't be about you. So but then you go there to be made different and then it becomes about us. There's something that happens in it. This is how people don't burn out, you know, because they go to the margins and they delight in the people they find. So you go where love has not yet arrived and you love what you find



there. And so that that just doesn't. That's eternally replenishing. That's never depleting. You're never burning out because you're really delighting in the person right in front of you.

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DAVID BENDER:

You talk about just that standing at the margins, placing yourself there to be there. And therefore, to some extent, it's not marginal anymore. You're right in the center of of everything.

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FATHER GREG BOYLE:

Well, it's the only way the margins get erased is by enough people going and standing out at them. And then all of a sudden you're together, imagining a circle of compassion, and then you're imagining nobody standing outside that circle. So it becomes inclusive and, you know, compassionate and and filled with unconditional love.

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DAVID BENDER:

There have been a number of times where I've been blessed to talk to people who've made me see that in ways that I, in normal course of the day, forget. And a lot of life is just remembering, remembering who we are and not getting caught up in all of the distraction and the noise. One of them was Harry Belafonte. Another was Elie Wiesel. Another was Desmond Tutu. When you're around people like that, you do feel touched by grace. You knew



someone like that, Cesar Chavez. Can you talk about Cesar Chavez for a moment?

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FATHER GREG BOYLE:

Tyson Chavez, who was a community organizer, farm worker organizer. And. So so I knew him and privileged to know him. And I always say about him that he was the best listener I've ever encountered. I mean, when you were talking to him, nobody else existed but you. You know, he he had that ability not to look over your shoulder to see if someone more important was on the approach. His whole being was kind of, uh, laser beam focused on you. So he was extraordinary. And a reporter once famously said to him. Wow. These farm workers, they sure love you. And he just shrugged and smiled and said, the feeling is mutual. And I've always loved that because I thought, yeah, the goal is mutuality. You know, not saving the day or even making progress, though progress is nice, but it's really about we're in this together. And then how do you create a community of cherished belonging? You know, cherishing people is not hard, but remembering to cherish people is extremely, extremely difficult. And so that's kind of where we want to be. The homies here who are in recovery will say, you know, one day at a time and now we say, no, that's too long. You know, it's like one breath at a time, one breath you cherish with every breath. So systems change when people change and people change when they are cherished. And so I asked to homie the other day, I said, How are you doing? Because, you know, I'm just trying to stay lovestruck. Which I thought was pretty good, you know that. How do you stay lovestruck and how do you, uh, you know, once people discover that



loving is their home, they'll never be homesick again, you know? And so then they kind of stay anchored in it, and they let love live through them. And it has nothing to do with return. You know, will they receive love? Just doesn't matter, you know, because if loving is your home, then that's where you stay. That's where you reside. And then you're never homesick. So you're never lamenting. You know, the Tibetans say, you know, wherever you have received the most love, that's your home. And they go, yeah, I guess. But the problem is sometimes you're not home. Now what? Then You're stuck with homesickness. Unless loving is your home. And then it doesn't matter where you are or what you receive. You know, you're just. Loving and so pUca homegirl here. We all call her Puka. Her name is Stephanie, but she says that Homeboy Love is the lens. It's how we see things. And I think it's brilliant. I think that's exactly right. You know, so it's more eyewear than than anything else. It's just simply. You know, how you how you will choose to see things and then it's liberating and then the world can throw it to whatever it's going to throw at you and you're not going to be toppled because loving is your home. And and I think that's. But the answer.

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DAVID BENDER:

You know, you talked about not forgetting and talk about someone who lived at the margins. Mother Theresa, who you've quoted, famously put herself among the most despised people, lepers. This was where she was most present at the margins, among the least among us and among her people. And the quote that you used of hers is very similar to what you just said. The



problem in the world is that we've forgotten that we belong to each other. Can you talk about that idea that we forgot that we belong to each other?

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FATHER GREG BOYLE:

There's Mother Theresa quote I. It turns out I was in Philadelphia. I was on a panel and I quoted, as I always do, I say the problem in the world, Mother Theresa tells us, is that we've forgotten that we belong to each other. Well, the Philadelphia Inquirer kind of went back and checked it. And and the actual quote is something like, you know, if we continue to be at war, you know, it's because we've forgotten that we belong to each other. So then I liked it even more because you could fill in the blank, which I had neglected to fill. And, you know, if you have 75,000 homeless people living in tents in downtown L.A., it's because we've forgotten that we belong to each other. And, you know, if you have people dying of gang violence, it's because we've forgotten that we belong to each other. It just doesn't matter. You can fill in that blank with any complex, social vexing dilemma. If that persists, it's because we've forgotten that we belong to each other. So I think it's kind of a helpful guide, you know? And if we remembered it, you know, would we have 75,000 homeless sleeping on the street? No, I mean it because it's it's kind of how that's how powerful a notion it is.

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DAVID BENDER:



You've written a book, *Barking to the Choir: The Power of Radical Kinship*. And one of the notions, the idea of other rising people. You don't believe that there is the other.

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FATHER GREG BOYLE:

Yeah. You know, it's funny. Recently I was on a on a plane and I was in my aisle seat in the exit row with two homies. And I see this guy applauding and he's wearing a t shirt, is very tall. And I'm trying to figure out what's this t shirt say? And I can read it. And it says, And we were in Philadelphia. It says, Philly is everybody. And I remember thinking, wow, how great kinship connection. A community of cherished belonging, mutuality. And as the t shirt got closer, it said Philly versus everybody. And I went, Oh, shoot, We were so close there. You know, and that's that's that's kind of the notion, you know, how do we arrive at nobody versus anybody. And but it's a good gauge. It's how you catch yourself if you're demonizing anybody, if you're underwriting anybody, if you're kind of relegating somebody to be outside the circle of compassion. All these things are the opposite of how God sees. And so, you know, how do you maintain the integrity of that, you know, where there is no us and them, there's just us. And. And so, you know, I would maintain that God's dream come true is not that people worship God, but that we be one. That's God's dream come true. A community of kinship such that God might recognize it. That's the whole ballgame. And so everything is inching its way to that. Even here at Homeboy. You know, healing is kind of the primary thing. Everything is secondary, but what's the point of healing? The point of healing is then to create and nurture into being a community of cherished



belonging. So so that's the the fruit of, of your own personal healing and coming to terms with whatever was done to you or whatever you did and then moving on to what? To creating a culture and and a community where no one is left out.

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DAVID BENDER:

How do you measure healing? Is there a metric for it?

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FATHER GREG BOYLE:

Healing is never about so much a, you know, moral judgment. It's about a health assessment. And so you're always everybody is on a continuum of two steps forward, eight steps backwards. You know, we're all crazy here at Homeboy Industries, thank God. We're not all crazy on the same day. So. So everybody is nobody's well until everybody is well. And. And so you're trying to walk each other home to wholeness. And. And we all have an experience that's human of being fractured and broken and wounded and traumatized. And. And so we're moving towards, uh, not holiness. I mean, holiness is being whole. Somebody told me the other day, which I had never heard before in the Scripture, Jesus says, Be perfect as your father in heaven is perfect, but the Aramaic is not perfect. It's whole. The whole. When then when you think about that, then you go, Yeah, I like that. You know, it's all interchangeable. Holy, healthy whole. It's all the same thing. And if you if you measure it against your own experience, nobody has ever met a holy person who wasn't healthy and whole and nobody's made a whole person who wasn't holy. And I



think it's how it works. And and, you know, unfortunately, there's been this moral overlay that's never helped us and it's never kept us moral. It's just kept us from each other. So where we say these are good people and these are bad people and it's just not how God sees. God sees God's people, period. You know, after recent shooting, I remember I read a bishop who said, sacred scripture clearly states that God stands with the victims and not the victimizers. And they go, I suppose he could prove that by going to some text, but it will never the day won't ever come when that point of view aligns itself. To the energies of God, the God of love. And once you know the God of love, you fire all the other gods as the great Mirabai Starr says. So you want to align the compass of your heart to to the God we actually have. The one who doesn't see victim or victimizers, just sees sons and daughters and can always the homeys here say, you know, find the thorn underneath. How do you get underneath what just happened? You know, knowing that violence is a language? What languages that speak. And and they're adept at that here because gang members know, you know, it's just the language of a lethal absence of hope or is this the language of. Severe trauma or is this the language of mental illness? Because then once you know that, then you infuse hope or you help heal damage or you deliver mental health services. So how you name things, this is about as important a thing as can be.

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DAVID BENDER:

So much is done in the name of Scripture or the Koran or any holy book. It is used often to create otherness, to create war. That's been as long as any recorded history shows us. How do you reconcile that and what does one do



about that with the people deep faith who do things that certainly don't reflect the God of love?

00:35:10:00

FATHER GREG BOYLE:

A homie who writes me every morning. Email. We email each other. We look at the readings of the day and from scripture, and then we just each whoever gets up first writes a little thing. And he wrote and said, you know, we need a mystical lens, you know, a filter where you can read the scripture in such a way and say, you know, yes, yes, No, I don't believe that. Yes, yes, No, that's completely off. You know, so you encounter in scripture a wrathful God and you go, no, the day will never come when God is wrathful or they'll try to temper it. They'll say, God, he was slow to anger. Then we'll know God is no to anger. So it's you know, it's all human projection and and natural, but it requires a filter. Now, you know, a mystical filter. Once you know the god of love, you, you sift out these things that aren't aligned with the God we actually have. And so at the same homie who I call my spiritual director, he he he wrote not long ago, Love is never a false doctrine, which I thought was pretty good, you know. And one day I think it was they were talking about forgiveness. And he says, I'm uncomfortable with forgiveness because there's too much waiting, you know, apology offered after a wait. Apology accepted after a wait. He says there's too much back and forth, back and forth, back and forth. He said, I just believe in fourth, which I thought was brilliant. And then he said, fourth is mercy and God is mercy. And so, like this kind of notion of no waiting, it's like the father running down the road. Once he sees his son, who is he thought was dead. And he's already planning the fatted calf



banquet. And he doesn't want an apology. He's just he just wants to welcome his kid. That's what it is. So it comes to a place once you know you know who that God is then. Then you can't otherize. You can't demonize your human. So you have to catch yourself. But we're all walking each other home to health because in wholeness. Because none of us are well too. All of us are well. I was in the Chicago Midway Airport, and I see this very young woman, and it was right after that man had assaulted the aged Asian woman on the streets of San Francisco. Whenever that was a couple of years maybe now during pandemic, I think. And she was wearing a T-shirt that said Love, not hate. And I remember looking at it and and I thought, you know, if I wore a shirt like that, it would be about me and it can't be about me. And oddly, it it's why we don't make progress, because it's still otherize us. It says, I stand with the people who love and I'm really defiantly against those who hate, which is to say there are people who don't belong to us. But in the same airport, I see an older woman and she's wearing a t shirt and it says unwell. And I thought, finally, progress.

00:38:49:00

DAVID BENDER:

Can you be all can you be holy in your view and not believe in God?

00:38:56:00

FATHER GREG BOYLE:

Oh, yeah. I mean, because again, I think being holy is about being healthy and healthy. People are loving people and and God is love. So so for me, there's no. Contradiction in that at all. You know, people are that's the measure. The



measure is, you know, are you loving? And the only people can pull off being loving and cherishing our healthy people. So so, you know, you want to remove the obstacles and you want the blindfold to fall and you want people to. You can't really love goodness as the prophet Micah says, unless you love, you know, love goodness in here, you can't love goodness out there. And it's kind of a prerequisite. And so it. And the Dalai Lama, who I was privileged to meet and he you know, somebody asked him on BBC, I was channel surfing. And and they said, you know, well, you know, what's the mark of authentic religion? And he thought about it a second and he kind of repeats it back. The question and this English is kind of clunky and he said the mark and measure, as he put it, both hands over his chest, and he said warm heartedness. And I thought, well, that's it. You know, it's not about adherence to anything, you know. It's just warm heartedness. And, and and he understood that in two ways. One is a kind of your own self knowledge. And then it's it's a warm heartedness that has to go out into the world and be warm hearted there, you know. And so Gandhi said, you know, I have chosen to be a disciple of Jesus. And and he not once stopped being a Hindu. And so that was kind of the idea. You know, it's about warm heartedness. It's about love. It's not about adherence to a belief system. And so can you can you pull this off? Can you pull off holiness without believing in God? We have so many examples.

00:41:18:00

DAVID BENDER:

And what you just said is is enormously helpful because we know that there are a lot of people who have an obstacle. They either believe in a different God and there's amnesty that comes from a disagreement over which God or



they believe in no God. And they're told that they are evil and bad for not believing in the God of their family or the God of their community.

00:41:41:00

FATHER GREG BOYLE:

Yeah. You know, I just don't buy it. You know, I mean, because I think that. You know, the God we actually have is spacious and wild, as Mr. Eckhart used to say, who is, you know, a mystic and a theologian. And he said, it's a lie. And he talk of God that doesn't comfort you. So, you know, if you get to a place where. You know, the gods, you have as puny and judgmental and quick to be angry or ever angry, then you know, your God is too small. And and so I don't know. I think it's important to always imagine a God that's spacious and expansive. And that's important because I think there's nothing more consequential than your notion of God. If if if your God is puny, then you have to be If your God is spacious, then you'll be intimately welcoming and generous. And so you discover the generosity of God. And then you choose to be that generosity in the world. That's how it works, you know? You receive the tender glance, and then you become the tender glance. You notice the notice of God, and then you become the notice of God in the world. So, you know, it's it's so expansive, but it's not difficult because you get to a place, you know, by definition, heaven is the place that you want to spend eternity. And if it's, you know, a God who's judgmental and, you know, kind of a jerk, then then nobody wants to spend eternity there. And that's how you know that chances are God is not a jerk. Well, I've never uttered that sentence before, but. But that's what I mean. You know.



00:43:46:00

DAVID BENDER:

We do take a moment and make reference to you want to have the Westboro Baptist Church people protesting at your funeral.

00:43:53:00

FATHER GREG BOYLE:

In this very office. It was a young woman named Nellie who has had all the worse things befall her kids, taken away abuse of every imaginable kind. Prison gang where we're sold drugs, used drugs. And I just I stand in awe at what she's had to carry in her lifetime rather than in judgment at how she's carried it. And so she's sitting in front of my desk back there, and I don't know, she has the light bills she has to pay or something. So I'm writing a check to help her out. And and she leans, you know, with her chin resting on her fist at the front of my desk and she says, Damn, gee, I wish you were. I wish you were God. And I laughed. I said, Why? And she goes and her eyes swell up with tears. And she says, I think you'd let me into heaven. And it just broke my heart in two. And. And I stopped writing the check. And I leaned and I grabbed her hands and I pulled her in. And I looked her in the eye and I said, if I get to heaven and you're not there. I'm not staying. And I believe that, you know. So do I think anybody's in hell? No, I don't think it exists. Or as the Mystics say, maybe it exists, but it's empty. And in do I think everybody's going to be welcomed in? Yeah. Just because. You know, I'm nobody, but, you know, you know enough to welcome people here at this place. There's nobody who's unwelcome. And how much more so? God.



00:45:43:00

DAVID BENDER:

One of the communities that has been told it is not welcome is the LGBTQ community. And that's been particularly true in the Catholic Church. And I wonder how you see that and how. Because a number of people of the LGBTQ community feel like they've been told from birth that they're damned and can never be redeemed and do everything they can to prove otherwise and often in a bad way. Can you speak to that a bit?

00:46:12:00

FATHER GREG BOYLE:

Yeah. Again, everybody's unshakably good and we belong to each other. And and so, you know, my notion of who God is is welcoming of everybody. And it and again, it's just, you know, some of it is just psychology and ignorance and how do people not understand things? You know, God love Jesus and I do. But he thought the guy having seizures was possessed by a demon. And. And he wasn't. He had epilepsy. And so I don't hold that against Jesus. You know, he knew as best as anybody in the audience knew who were watching him here, this guy. I don't doubt that. But but it's a good parallel to stuff, you know, because we think there are demons and there aren't any. They're just people who belong to us. And nobody chooses to be LGBTQ. You know, it it's like being right handed or left handed. So it's kind of a silly thing. But I acknowledge the pain that the Catholic Church has, in fact, caused over 2000 years. I mean, how are you going to deny that? You just can't. And again, this doesn't have anything to do with morality. You know, except for the fact that it's. Yeah, it's not moral to exclude. So Jesus took four things seriously



Inclusion, nonviolence, unconditional loving kindness and compassion and acceptance. And if members of the LGBTQ community do not feel welcomed by people of Catholic faith or Christian beliefs, then it just means we're not taking seriously what Jesus took seriously. Now what I bet my entire life and salvation on that statement, Of course I would. Of course I would. Because once you know the God of love, you just go, No, this is a God who welcomes everybody. But it's a challenging belief just because, you know, recently in Lake Arrowhead, a man killed a woman who was flying a flag, a pride flag, and and that woman belonged to us and that man who did that also. And so that's the challenge, you know, because you just say, you know, in a previous time somebody might have thought he was possessed by a demon. But no, he clearly was mentally ill. And this is clear, clear, clear. And nobody chooses to be mentally ill. Mental illness chooses them. And so the minute you make it into some kind of moral thing, we get stopped in our tracks and then we're not able to move beyond. We just shake our fists. And rather than say people belong to us. And people are carrying pain. And and I don't know. I'm old fashioned. I like to make progress. You know, and we would make we don't make progress when we denounce truthfully it we get stuck as opposed to saying how do we roll up our sleeves? How do we notice? How do we recognize signs of people who are leaving Internet bread crumbs that they're racist or that they're homophobes or that they're xenophobes? All those things are indicators. They all point beyond themselves to the fact that people aren't whole. Well, how do we walk each other home to wholeness rather than just say you're part of them and you don't belong to us?

00:50:16:00



DAVID BENDER:

It's so interesting. You you raise this with social media because obviously you and I are of the same era where it didn't exist. And now in this century, it is ubiquitous. People communicate without ever seeing each other. In some ways, that can make it very easy to otherize because you can do so anonymously. If you were looking at this problem, this these people who just and many are clearly mentally ill, some are not, some are choosing to follow Naziism. They've chosen white nationalism as a path. How do you suggest Because I think we're at an inflection point dealing with that now, because it seems to be a real phenomenon that wasn't there when you and I were growing up.

00:51:04:00

FATHER GREG BOYLE:

Yeah, I guess I would. Does a healthy whole person who is Well, you know, is that can that person be a fascist? No, they can't. I mean, that's an impossible notion. And so that's why it's important to talk about, you know, none of us are. Well, until all of us are well, because nobody chooses to be unwell. We're all born wanting the same things. And then something happens. And I know this from working with gang members for 40 years. Something happens. Trauma, despair. That's bleak. Or bona fide diagnosable mental illness. But mental illness. You don't choose it. Nobody chooses it, and it chooses you. And I can't explain how that happens. But I remember I was talking with somebody and they were talking about, you know, a public figure who she was saying was a racist. And and I said, well, these are indicators they point, but beyond themselves, you know, racism, misogyny, anti-Semitism,



xenophobe, homophobe, these are all pointing beyond themselves to to a condition that that needs addressing. And she was a therapist and she said, oh, by the way, racism is not a mental illness. And then I looked at her. I said, what else would it be? I mean, what else would it be? And if it then it reduces us to our third grade mind that says it's bad people doing bad things. I go, What else would it be? Of course it's mental illness. But people get tripped up by the diagnosis. You know, a guy shoots 50, kills 50 people at a concert in Las Vegas, and and they had to close the case after a year because they went. We couldn't find the motive. I said I knew the minute I heard that 50 people were killed. This man is not well. He belongs to us. He was not well. I think it can't be that because we couldn't find a file in a psychiatrist's office. Like. Oh, yeah, I think you might have missed him and. And we might have missed it. And so, I don't know. I think that's an important that's a that's a moment because we get forced back to this binary thing that says there are good people and they're bad people. And because there aren't that, then you have to say, yeah, I've never met a homophobe who was healthy, who was whole, doesn't touch their goodness. But I've never met anybody who held that view who was whole. And then. But I don't sure, we can say that somebody chooses not to be well. And even if you say, well, they're not cooperating with their their own healing, well, that's a different thing. It just means that people's agency is compromised. It's hard for them. I because I see this here, you know, and it's difficult. You go this, okay, you need to be in recovery. You need to be talking to somebody, a therapist, and you need to take your meds. If you stop taking your meds, it's going to go haywire. And some times they don't, you know, cooperate and and and so and that's tricky. But it's still agency. That's compromise. But I don't think people choose to be unwell. I think it happens.



00:55:09:00

DAVID BENDER:

We talked to the last worker who almost died having been brutally beaten by the police at a protest in San Francisco and is now 93 and remains in the fight in a good way. I mentioned the struggle, like how you met her. Can you speak to that indefatigable ity of Delores and people like her?

00:55:33:00

FATHER GREG BOYLE:

Yeah. Dolores Work like Cesar Chavez. Like the Dalai Lama. People, you know, like Pope Francis, people you're in the presence of who who know how to put first things recognizably first. And they know how to live as though the truth were true. And. And. And I think I kind of believe in in people who who extend the invitation, you know, because an indictment is just of the rising. But an invitation is always pulling people in you people into La Lucha, you pull people into the struggle. You pull people in to stand in the lowly places. Saint Ignatius of Loyola would say you pull people in to kind of be anchored in. Loving goodness and and choosing to be just but you can't love goodness or be just oh if if there isn't a fundamental healing that's happened in your life. So I think that's important. You know, how do you help each other? See, you know, we're always loaning our glasses and our lenses so that people can kind of approximate, you know, how to set the compass of their own hearts, how to align. Their energies with the energy of the God who loves us without measure and without regret. But it's difficult. It's really hard to catch ourselves because we want to strike a high moral distance, which in the end,



if I did that, it's about me and it can't be about me. And but it also is about distance. And distance is the opposite of, you know, of who God is. And so, you know, separation is an illusion. And so how do you always kind of promote an invitation to union and kinship?

00:57:52:00

DAVID BENDER:

And again, La Casa, Dolores says, are were about community organizing and drawing people in attracting people. You said this with Cesar. He made you feel like you're special. Dolores does that as well. Yes.

00:58:06:00

FATHER GREG BOYLE:

Yeah, I mean, certainly Dolores work is. I mean, she's an amazing and she's. And I've never seen her not speak at any public event, any public event where she doesn't lead people into some kind of chant at the end of it, you know, where they're all doing the farm worker clapping. And it's just so delightful. But again, these are folks who are. Who are lights, you know, and but genuine lights are always wanting to point to the light that is in everything.

00:58:47:00

DAVID BENDER:

You talked about a man named Louie who had a dream with you in it and he was in darkness. Can you tell that story?

00:58:55:00



FATHER GREG BOYLE:

So there's a homie I know named Lulu, and he was a gang member and he was selling crack cocaine, as they did in those days. And then he became his own best customer. Finally, I convinced him to go to rehab. He reluctantly agreed, and so he went to this place. I drove him to this place in the hills. Of Los Angeles and 30 days in, his younger brother did something that gang members never do. He put a gun to his head and took his own life. So I called Lulu and I told him and of course he was devastated. And I said, Look, I'm going to pick you up for the funeral, but I'm going to drive you right back to the rehab. And he goes, I want you to. Oh, I like how recovery feels. So I go pick him up. He gives me a big lasso and he gets in the car and he says, I had a dream last night and you were in it. And he said, We were in like a classroom size room, but there were no windows, no lights, no illuminated exit signs, no light creeping under the door. It was just pitch black. And I know you're there, he tells me. But you're silent. And so am I. And so he says that in the silence, I reach into my pocket and I have a flashlight, and I. And I pull it out and I aim it steadily on the light switch on the wall. And as he tells me the dream, he says, I know I'm the only one who can turn that light switch on. I'm really glad that you happen to have a light switch or a flashlight. And so he follows the beam of light steadily until he, with great trepidation, stands in front of the light switch. And he takes a deep breath and he flips the light on and the room is flooded with light. And now he's sobbing in the telling of the story. And he says the light is better than the darkness. Like he didn't know that to be the case. And then he said, I guess my brother just never found the light switch. Well, I've never had an experience like that in my 69 years of living, that in an instant my whole life changed. I changed everything how I was



doing things. And I probably ten years into this work and I just stopped by it, I realized that I had been trying to turn the light switch on for people and you can't do it. And I and I probably was always perilously close to burnout. And I've never been since because of that dream that he told me. And then I just stopped. And it wasn't about me. And it wasn't about fixing or saving or rescuing or saving anybody. It was it was just being content with the fact that everybody owns a flashlight and everybody knows where to aim it. And none of us are well until all of us are well. So help people aim the flashlight in the general direction of the light switch and watch people who are who will respond to that invitation, you know, step towards the light switch and then they'll find their agency to be able to do that.

01:02:28:00

DAVID BENDER:

Homeboy, which started a great mother being necessity, first schooling, then jobs. You tried a lot of different things including and I should have thought that you would have learned this from Nixon Plumbing. And can can you can you explain some of that, homeboy?

01:02:49:00

FATHER GREG BOYLE:

Yeah, sure. So Homeboy Industries, we've now evolved from that time when we were started a school and a jobs program, we've now evolved. Nobody kind of thought this up, much less me. But we've backed our way into now becoming the largest gang intervention rehab reentry program on the planet. So 10,000 folks a year walk through our doors here wanting to reimagine



their lives, you know, and, you know, and all of them come barricaded behind a wall of shame and disgrace. And the only thing that can scale that wall is tenderness. But healing is kind of the centerpiece. So it's a 18 month training program, but it's mainly time to kind of dedicate yourself to your own work, you know, And and so we have therapy and free tattoo removal and 13 social enterprises, justice enterprises, if you will, bakery restaurants. We have a diner at City Hall, the only place you can get food. We have two restaurants that two terminals that L.A.X. homeboy electronic recycling and and 13 altogether. And so. But more than anything is is the culture you know, homies and homegirls walk through the doors and they come with what psychologists would call a disorganized attachment. Her mom was frightening or frightened. And you can't really calm yourself down if you've never been soothed. So the place is a safe place where folks feel seen and then they can feel cherished. We have so many of done 2030. We have somebody who 47 years in prison and, you know, they will say we're used to being watched, but we're not used to being seen. And so that's kind of the liberating thing is to be seen. And then the, you know, sort of something of a sanctuary and then they become the sanctuary that they sought here. And then they go home and they present that sanctuary to their kids and suddenly you've broken a cycle. And so that's kind of how it works, you know.

01:05:08:00

DAVID BENDER:

You tell the story of how the tattoo removal process began.

01:05:12:00



FATHER GREG BOYLE:

Many years ago. I was sitting at my desk at another office. You a previous headquarters, and a guy comes in named Frank, who had never met before. And he was just two days out of Corcoran State Prison, and he was sitting in front of my desk and among his many tattoos on his face was bald, black, old English letters on his forehead that said Fuck the world. And he looked at me and he said, You know, I am having a hard time finding a job. I said, Well, Frank, maybe we can put our heads together on this one. And so I hired him naturally. And so he begged Brett. I remember that was his job. He would just bag loaves of bread. And then at White Memorial Hospital, I found a doctor named Dr. Jack Wagner who had a laser machine. And I coaxed him into giving me an hour a month to chip away at Frank's forehead and a few others. And then in no time, I had a waiting list of 3000 gang members who wanted the same treatment, so we couldn't stay with that arrangement. But I always add that currently he's a security guard at a movie studio. Probably not that employed at the moment, but with the strike. But he's and there is no trace left of the angriest, dumbest thing he's ever done. Proving, as they say, that all of us are a whole lot more than the worst things we've ever done.

01:06:47:00

DAVID BENDER:

The one thing that we had hoped to see and we might when we come back, is Fabian and my singer at the Bora. And the art studio. Can you talk about that?

01:06:56:00

FATHER GREG BOYLE:



Art Academy, The Art Cowboy Art Academy, founded by Fabian Dvora, who came through the program here and was a drug counselor here. But it was always just an extraordinary artist. So that's part of his dream is in our dream to at Homeboy is to somehow marry his gift and add it to a way to invite others who who are equally gifted and then to use it as a means to heal. Folks through the graphic arts and but he's an astounding muralist and artist.

01:07:36:00

DAVID BENDER:

And there is an art academy. There's a physical space.

01:07:38:00

FATHER GREG BOYLE:

Yeah. So so we have three locations here really, in terms of our, you know, our, our youth reentry center, our headquarters here and and the Homeboy Art Academy that he directs.

01:07:51:00

DAVID BENDER:

What music gives you joy? How does music touch you? And can you speak to that?

01:07:57:00

FATHER GREG BOYLE:

Yeah, You know, it's funny. I'm kind of stuck in our generation, you know, I mean, a little bit, you know? But I'm kind of. I'm such a news junkie that



that's kind of what I listen to all the time, you know, and a political junkie. So that kind of takes precedence over actually listening to music. But I'll retrieve, you know. From from the 70s, you know, Joni Mitchell and Crosby, Stills, Nash and Young and and, uh, and the Stones and, you know, the Beatles. So I can retrieve those things. So but I don't really stay up on music or even, you know, listen to radio or have, you know, I don't even know how to talk about it.

01:08:47:00

DAVID BENDER:

Here's some news. There's no radio anymore.

01:08:50:00

FATHER GREG BOYLE:

I just I was trying to say playlist. I don't know how to read.

01:08:53:00

DAVID BENDER:

This to you. I came as a shock to me because I did radio for years. Yeah, but. But there is no such thing. But when and if you say that, try saying the word transistor. So often when you listen to Joni Mitchell, when you listen to the Stones, The Beatles, Crosby, Stills, Nash, it touches something in you.

01:09:13:00

FATHER GREG BOYLE:

Yeah. I mean, I because I can, you know, I can just know you can just go to YouTube and have something playing, you know, like Woodstock, Woodstock



or or the White Album or, or all these things, you know, from my youth, you know, that, you know, kind of brings her back. But, you know, like concerts or are who, who, who does music now? Yeah. Boy, I'm not so much so I don't know anything.

01:09:42:00

DAVID BENDER:

I'm going to out you you're you're you're you're a hippie.

01:09:45:00

FATHER GREG BOYLE:

I'm I'm I'm an old hippie. I, you know, guilty as charged. But I'm also geezer. And so I don't really know how all these things work. You know, homies have to so they they were changing my Siri voice to this Irish woman. They say what voice? What what are my options? Well, Iris I go get do it. And so I once I was giving a homily and and out of my left pocket, I was right there. There's a pause in the middle of my preaching. And this Irish beautiful voice says, I do not understand what you're saying. I said, Well, join the damn club. And I powered her off. But she, you know, she she gives me directions, you know, And I'm so glad that they did that because, you know, she'll say, turn into the car park and all these things. Teller Remind our relatives from Ireland and and I my favorite thing in fact I'm hoping the title of my next book about it is when she'll say accident Ahead. And then there's this pause and you wait and she says, you're still on the fastest route. And I love it. I'm consoled by it. I think, Oh, how great. I'm still on the fastest route. I don't even think it means you're on the quickest route, but it's the surest route, you know, you're going

to get there. And and so I that's kind of, you know, I think love. It's still the fastest route. It's still going to get you to exactly where you want to get, especially at this time where we're there's such a tribalism and polarizing and huge gulfs and divisions that, you know, love, it's still the fastest route. Love never ends and love never fails and love never stops loving. These are all translations of. The Road to Love Has no end Translations of one Corinthians Love never fails. There are different translations, but the First Nations translation is the road. Of love has no end.

END TC: 01:12:04:00