



Nat Damon:

Welcome back to another episode of Reach Teach Talk. This is an extremely special episode because this marks our 40th episode of this podcast, 40 episodes, 40 guests talking about the relationships in the classroom and the classroom of life, the power of relationships, and truly the power of love in each relationship. Whether it's our relationships with ourselves, whether it's our relationship with our environment, with our students, as parents, with parents, with schools. Our relationships mean everything. Relationships are at the center and the heart of humanity. And I cannot be more honored to have and to welcome our special guest on this 40th episode of Reached Teach Talk, Father Gregory Boyle, the founder of Homeboy Industries, a Jesuit priest. And by the way, Homeboy Industries, just to back it up for a moment, is the largest intervention, gang intervention, rehabilitation and reentry program in the world.

Father Greg goes back to his education at Loyola High School. He was a teacher where he was also a teacher years later, he was a chaplain in Mexico. He worked in the Christian base communities in Bolivia and was ultimately appointed pastor of Dolores Mission Church in the Boyle Heights neighborhood of LA back in 1986 where he served until 1992. Homeboy Industries was found in 1988 and it is now the largest gang intervention rehab and reentry program in the United States. Father Gregory Boyle, he is a legend here in California and around the world. He has received the California Peace Prize and been inducted into the California Hall of Fame. In 2014 under Obama, the White House named Boyle, a champion of change. He received the University of Notre Dame's 2017 Laetare Medal, which is the oldest honor given to American Catholics. Father Greg is the acclaimed author of three books, Tattoos on the Heart, Barking to the Choir, and most recently The Whole Language, which is his third book. And he continues to donate all net proceeds to Homeboy Industries. Father Greg, I want to welcome you to Reach Teach Talk.

Father Greg Boyle:

Thank you. It's great to be with you.

Nat Damon:

I'm thrilled to have you with us and really because what you've done with Homeboy Industries is focus on three central tenets of what we continue to focus on, on Reach Teach Talk, which is the three tenets are belongingness, hope and love. And I want to start off our conversation with a quote from a poem by poet Mary Oliver, which you actually quote in your most recent book, The Whole Language. "This is the first, the wildest and the wisest thing I know, that the soul exists and is built solely out of attentiveness." The soul exists and it is built solely out of attentiveness, she's talking about relational wholeness here, is that right?

Father Greg Boyle:

Yeah, I think so. She's talking about the discipline of alertness. How are we to look at something with attention? There's a Spanish word called *acatar*, and it means to look with attention. And so with your eyes wide open where you notice people, you become the notice of God, you have your tentacles out so that you move beyond your own self-absorption so that you can somehow be connected to people. And it is, yeah, relational wholeness.

Nat Damon:

So it's a power seeing, of being seen, of observing and noticing. And I'm going to bring this to the classroom because this is where Rich Teach Talk continues to recenter itself on relationships in the classroom and within schools and school communities. Is there any lessons you can share with our audience here, which is largely comprised of teachers and parents about noticing about the power of being seen, if there's any way that we can see our students with broader eyes, wider eyes, and a broader horizon line?

Father Greg Boyle:

Yeah, part of it is just the intentionality you decide to choose this way. So the Buddhists say, oh nobly blue born, remember who you really are. And so you want to see people as they really are. Here at the homies always say, because they've all been locked up for so long. They go, we're used to being watched, but we're not used to being seen. And obviously there's a wide difference between those two things. A homie said to me, if you see me, I will never forget what I look like. And that's exactly as it is, as it should be.

And I was talking to somebody the other day who works with homeless people in another state and she was saying, homeless people don't become homeless because they run out of money, they become homeless because they run out of relationships. And so part of what teachers do in a very primary way is you're not just communicating or sharing knowledge, you're hoping that your kids won't run out of relationships. And that's part of what you do, that they'll always say, the kids aren't going to remember exactly what you told them, but they'll never forget how you made them feel. So the more you can decide to help people not to run out of relationships, where people more and more feel less invisible because you're looking at them, you're seeing them, oh, nobly born, they're reminding them who they are.

Nat Damon:

I love that because I'm thinking about the classroom and I'm thinking about how when a teacher says, I see you, I see what you're doing, it's mostly watching, I'm watching you, I'm watching your actions and I'm judging your actions here. But to be seen could actually come in the form of not just through the eyes, but it could be a comment on a paper, it could be a comment that says, your thesis, you're developing your thesis statements with so much more clarity now than you did a few months ago. In other words, I see that, I see you, and I'm holding the bar because I believe in you. You have a great story in *The Whole Language* of two boys who get onto a bus and they're carrying a rat and they are seen. Do you recall the story?

Father Greg Boyle:

Yeah, it was so long ago, but yeah, I was studying, I was in Berkeley and there an old African American man gets on the bus and he sits next to these brothers and maybe they were twins. And he says, what you got in the box? And they opened it up and it was a big old rat, I could see it from where I was standing behind them and had air holes and everything and said, what are you going to do with it? We're going to bring it home and show it to our mom. And the old guy said, Oh my God, she'll be

thrilled. But the thing was, he just really asked them questions and he really engaged with them and they came alive.

The song says, long lay the world in sin and error pining till he appeared, and the soul felt it's worth. Yeah, it's about Jesus. Yeah, it's about Christmas, but it's also about this old Black man with dreadlocks sitting next to these two kids and he appeared and their souls felt their worth. And it wasn't because he was exactly affirming them or anything, it's just he was listening to them, he was intrigued by them, he asked them questions and they answered the questions and he entered into an engagement that they came alive because they felt seen, they felt important. And that's just beautiful to behold.

Nat Damon:

It is so beautiful to behold. And it's one of the aspects of working in schools that I have loved for over 25 years now, is the opportunities to just have what we call a sidebar conversation, a 10 second sidebar like, Hey Jimmy, walking down the hallway, I see you, or I saw you at the soccer game yesterday and you were awesome, or I saw the way you got out of your carpool this morning and you were just so bedraggled and I see you now and you're alive and alert. What happened between eight o'clock and 10:30 this morning?

And to see when you really look into their eyes, the student's eyes, and to see that connection, and to see them in a sense stand up a little straighter just because they know that they're in, they're within your eyesight, they're within your field of vision. And also not just your field of vision, Father Greg, but I dare say there is something about the heart connection that comes through the eyes and you actually mention in the whole language, you talk about how our souls long to be seen. And that is exactly just that story and what we facilitate here with Reach Academics and also to improve the dynamics within schools.

Father Greg Boyle:

Yeah, you know what? It's not hard to do, it's simple to do, but it's difficult to remember to do it.

Nat Damon:

Yes.

Father Greg Boyle:

And that's the key, you have to remind yourself to cherish people with every breath. And in 12 steps they say one day at a time, well that's way too much time. It's like, how about every breath, every breath you take, you're choosing to cherish whoever is in your path. And in the end, that's where the joy is. You feel joyful. I've been gone, I've had COVID and it was mild, but I've been gone for 10 days. So this is my first day back and it's so wonderful because if you can decide to cherish and to notice people and to look at people and listen to people, it doesn't get better than that, and everybody comes alive and is awakened to something larger and it's perfect.

Nat Damon:

This is perfect because you mentioned, I'm sorry you had COVID by the way recently and I'm glad it was a mild case. The final chapter of the whole language is called Please Unmute Yourself. And it connects to what we're talking about, about being seen I think, because I worked in a school during that COVID year, the remote year we'll call it, the 2021 school year. And it was hard on so many levels. And one of the challenges was to establish connection, to show your students that you do see them, even though you're not literally in close proximity with them. And I keep thinking to myself, we're so lucky that in a sense the only saving grace about COVID possible is that at least the technology was with us to be able to run schools remotely. We had the bandwidth and the technology. And that is not to say that

everybody had access to the bandwidth. A lot of inequities were brought to light as well during COVID that we must rectify with and move forward stronger from.

Yet there's something about the screen and that chapter, Please Unmute Yourself is, it connotes to me the idea that I see you, but I'm actually looking at the camera just above you and I'm responding to you, but I know that there's a millisecond delay in that response. So now we have this chance, now that we're back in schools and we're back in person in proximity, in close proximity with each other, we have this incredible opportunity to take the lessons learned from when we didn't have this interpersonal connection and to really honor them. I love your word cherish Father Greg. The idea of when you see somebody, you're cherishing them. You use the word cherish quite often in your writings, and I'd love to hear your definition of what it is to cherish somebody. Yeah.

Father Greg Boyle:

Yeah. Principle, of course, among the traumatized, if it's true that somebody who's been traumatized may well traumatize others, then it has to be true that the cherished person will be able to find their way to the joy there is in cherishing themselves and others. So cherishing is just a way of holding, being attentive, know people's names, try to pick up signals, what are people going through? Ask the additional question. All that stuff is cherishing and it's like tenderness in a way because if love is the answer, community is the context. It's where it happens. But tenderness and cherishing is the methodology. It's how you make connective tissue of your love, otherwise it just stays in your head, yeah, I love my students, but it has to be translated in real-time in the real world by attention and curiosity and ask the second question and all that kind of stuff.

Nat Damon:

Time to cherish, my book is Time to Teach, Time to Reach. And yet if I were to write a follow-up, Time to Cherish might be that title, because I'm thinking about what you were just saying, it takes that second question, that follow-up question, all it takes rather is that follow up question. All it takes is that little knuckle on the student's desk as you're walking by. All it takes is, again, I saw you in the play and you were awesome as a park in midsummer. All it takes, it is so basic to us yet where's the time for that? And if we can come out of this pandemic period, now that we're entering into this endemic pandemic period with a recalibration on what it is to provide a cherishing classroom. Because when I think about cherish too and it's absolutely, it corroborates with your definition there.

It's holding something fragile, it's holding something with honor, it's stewarding and just being delicate, which is not to say being weak, it's you are the teacher, you're the strength, you're the guru, you're the priest, you are, you own that position. You are by title, you are by your past, you've earned this. And therefore it's a strength to show cherish, to show what it is to cherish your students. So I don't know, there's so much there and I'm thinking about also how schools can do this in terms of their daily schedule. For example, could you share a little bit about at Homeboy how you start the day every day? I love this idea of the assembly.

Father Greg Boyle:

Yeah, we call it morning meeting and it's at 8:50 in the morning and we all pack ourselves in here, and we have rituals to it. First we have a land acknowledgement, where are we standing? And then we have the mission statement, who are we? What are we about? And people read that. And then we have announcements, tattoo removal. And so today they said all day and then the whole 500 peoples, we all in a unison say all damn day. And then I say, well who are our providers? Then they name the doctors and then it's educational class, and cafe comes up, the soup of the day is chicken lime and somebody from the bakery comes up and says, coffee cakes are the best in the world and merchandise. And then the time comes when we say any announcements from the floor?

And like today it was breathtaking. A woman who'd been in prison for a lot of years, she could barely speak. She was so emotional and she said, I got my kids back yesterday. It's just unbelievable. Or somebody will say, I'm one year sober, or we had a bunch of things today that were very heartfelt and emotional and then somebody does a thought for the day and we end with a prayer. So it's 10 minutes, we sing Happy birthday. Today we had three birthdays and it's more home than home for people. And somebody said the other day, if love is a place, that place is Homeboy. So people are just very, they're greeted with great affection and that's, it's so wonderful to behold.

Nat Damon:

There's so much love in that depiction, the morning meeting and the vulnerability that comes with sharing your story like you shared those examples of people really opening their hearts and knowing that this is a safe environment for them to do so, it's safe and it's loving and you just use the term affection a moment ago, Father Greg, and I'd love to move into the topic of love, love at Homeboy, love in the classroom. And where I'd like to go with this part is this sense of not giving up on the members in your community, or from the school perspective, not giving up on your students no matter how grappling they are with you, no matter how much they may challenge you as a teacher and the only adult in the room, how you maintain that love, how you build that bridge with honesty and with an honest understanding that we're all human, we're all flawed, therefore we're never going to be perfect, we're never divine and we're not divine. We are God's creation in his image, not Gods ourselves.

So with that sense, that humble approach, I'd love to hear you, I'll start this with just, you have a phrase called no matter whatness that I love and it tends to follow after you say, I love you no matter what, or I blank you no matter what. I'd love for you to share how that came about and how that shows love.

Father Greg Boyle:

Well part of the problem, one of your tenants is about belongingness and you don't want to create a community of behaving people, but you want to create a community of belonging, of beloved belonging where people feel part of the thing. In the old days, people would leave, they'd drift away, they'd get high or they got arrested again. And we used to say, oh my God, I wonder if they'll ever come back. Nobody says that now, nobody, literally nobody. We just go, ah, he'll be back. Because once you have a dose, it's so compelling that you know you're confident in the dosage. So people will say, does kindness work? What happens if kindness doesn't work? And they, of course, say increase the dose. And that's how it works.

So beloved belonging is the goal. And when right now the homies run this place, but they know that behavior is a language, what language is that behavior speaking? So if somebody gets in a fight, well what's that about? Where are they coming from? And those are good questions because then you discover some guy acted out the other day and you go, whoa, that was really out of character once you just spend two minutes, you discover that it's raining and his mom's in a tent and getting high and somehow the rain activated this whole thing where he was just stressed out and on edge and don't even try to approach him, and sure enough, he starts to fight folks. And you don't want to just change behavior or even changing thinking like cognitive behavioral therapy. It's not about just change the way people think, it's about you love people into wholeness and we're all just walking each other home anyway. We're walking each other home to a place where people are well and none of us are well till all of us are well.

So you roll up your sleeves and you let go of a notion of being effective or successful. Not everything that works helps, but everything that helps works. And that's why it's important to do the stuff that helps, otherwise you're going to be a slave to evidence based outcomes. I'm not interested. And Mother Teresa says, we're not called to be successful, we're called to be faithful. So we want to be faithful to an approach that's whole and good and true and just and kind. And then yeah, the good news is the byproduct of that is, will be success. But if success is your engine, then you won't have a no matter

whatness. You're only going to want to work with the kids who are going to give you a successful outcome. I'm not interested in that because you want to be healing.

Nat Damon:

Yeah. Sorry, I was just thinking, I worked at a school once where I was really valued on the number of students in my AP English class, my AP advanced placement literature class that got fours and fives and how many of your kids scored that. And those were the metrics on being a successful teacher. And what you're talking about is just so much more essential and so much more significant. It's instilling a classroom environment of hope, of faith. It's establishing belongingness, it's showing your love through no matter whatness I am here, I'm not going to sever this bridge, this tie with you. And all of that takes time to cultivate.

Father Greg Boyle:

Yeah, absolutely. But that's where the joy is, because if you're going to the margins to make a difference, then it's about you. But if you go to the margins so that the folks there make you different, then it's about us. And then you never are depleted, you never burn out, ever. I have some of my senior staff, so I just think I need a break because I just guess I think I'm just too compassionate and I have to break it to them. I go, no, you've allowed this to become about you, it's not about you. So if you go to the margins to receive people and to be reached by people and to have your heart altered by your students, then that's eternally replenishing. You're never depleted. So somebody asked me once to write a blurb for a book about self-care for ministers, I did it but I don't believe in it.

Yeah, get some sleep, yeah, exercise, yeah, take some time out. But you are teachers and so you go there and you show up and you delight and you can't wait to get there. And you choose that, you choose to delight in the folks who are there. And so you become the notice, I always say the notice of God, you notice people and you go, wow, this is terrific. You're amazing. And then you're anchored in the two solid truths. Everyone is unshakably good, no exceptions. And we belong to each other, no exceptions. And so then you enter the classroom and it's like this couldn't be one bit better. Not good days, bad days. It's your duty to delight. And that's the thing that will keep you from burning out because the engine that drives you is your own fidelity to what you know is right and good and just and true rather than outcomes and success. And that's a whole new ballgame. It just turns everything on its head.

Nat Damon:

It's a total 180, Father Greg. It's also the idea that the classroom experience from teacher to students is bidirectional. Absolutely a hundred percent bidirectional. It is not you imparting the wisdom or the content to your students. They're not open vessels. If you're fortunate, if you're lucky, if you've got the bandwidth to be able to appreciate the fact that every day you walk into the classroom you've got 20, 25 individuals holding up a mirror to you and sharing this is who you are today, this is how you are today. And that is just such an incredible privilege. And if we can, you're right, if we can get the spotlight off the metrics and the quantitative measurements of what makes a good teacher and instead really focus on what you do every day and what you've built through Homeboy. The soul of Homeboy Industries is about belongingness and unconditional love and it is about loving them into loving it. It's the idea of taking the individual and not believing that any individual is capable of being evil.

They may be doing bad things, their behavior may be horrible, but they're not evil. And that is something where I think about the number of teachers who have come into my office in my past as a principal and just said, look, I can't teach this kid, this kid's just a bad kid. Or for example, the beginning of school meetings where you receive the files from fourth grade to fifth grade and you get the files on the kids and you learn, okay this kid's really good, you're not going to have any problem with this kid, Oh, but this kid watch out, this is going to be a really challenging kid for you. And to me that's always

been so counterintuitive to what a school or what a healthy organization should be about, which is every day is a possibility of a light bulb going off.

Every day is a possibility of sudden growth, because growth can happen so suddenly positive growth. And you're built to thousands and thousands of moments like that. I know that you've seen and you've written about in your books where you've seen it, you believe in it. And if I can put, I'm going to put words in your mouth. There's no such thing as truly an evil person. They're hurting, they're missing something desperately, but there's no evil. Can you elaborate on that a little bit?

Father Greg Boyle:

Yeah, yeah. So part of the thing is to, you try to recognize wound unless you make friends with your wound, your own wound, everybody's wounded.

Nat Damon:

Yes.

Father Greg Boyle:

Unless you make friends with your wound, you're going to be tempted to despise the wounded. And the kid who's difficult is a wounded kid. And once you've excavated your own wound, suddenly there's room in your heart for the kid who's acting out. And then you become reliable and then the kid becomes sturdy because you're directing all this positive energy and attention. And that's as it should be. And I used to teach a long time ago and it was funny, once you're relational, once you know every student's name by the next day after day one, then obviously these are teachers who don't have disciplinary problems, they never have to send a kid to the principal's office because it's relational, you know who this kid is. And then it is exquisitely mutual. I was in Houston once and a guy, a gang member who works with gang members was pleading with me. He says, how do you reach them? How do you reach gang members? And they said, well for starters stop trying to reach them. Can you be reached by them? Then it becomes exquisitely mutual.

It's you're honoring that person and they honor you and it's mutual and that's when it's at its best. That's not crossing a boundary, that's just acknowledging that we're human beings. It's funny, I had a dream the other night, I was about to do a big funeral of this woman who was a community organizer and I guess I think I had a lot of stress around it because it was huge. It was going to be outside because she was so beloved. And the night before I had a dream and in the dream somebody said to me, and I woke up and I wrote it down, the person said, look, all of us are born and all of us are going to die and all we have left is the tender time in between. And I just woke up and wrote that down and I thought, I don't know where it comes from in some subconscious thing, but it's all we have is the tender time.

So as teachers, you acknowledge that it's tender time that you don't want to waste a minute of it, and it's not about you. And the more it can be about us, the more joyful it is and it's more full for people when it's about us. I don't transform anybody's life, I don't save any life, I don't fix anybody. But I know that transformation happens here in this place. And the same thing happens in a classroom because you need a place and a communal space where transformation can happen and it happens in each other's company. And you want to be good company with each other. You want to be people who welcome their own wounds and find room in their heart for other wounded people. And so it's the difference. Homies come out of prison and sometimes we have a lot of lifers here who's done 25 years, one guy did 44 years. And it's funny, one of them said the other day, and I think it's so true, he said, in prison I got insight. But at Homeboy I found healing.

And there's a difference because we think it's about knowledge, it's about changing your thinking that it's about insight. What kind of insights can you gain? And insights are as good as far as they go. But don't settle for insight, hold out for healing, which is really a more fuller experience. And that's the

difference. The homies have that palpable experience where they attended all the self-help classes and they've come to some insight, but that doesn't mean that they're healed.

Nat Damon:

Healing. Healing versus gaining insight. Before we move into the last sub heading here of our conversation, which is going to be about hope. And as we exit the theme of love that we've been talking about for the past 15 minutes or so, there is the disappointment that comes when we have been that bridge to a student and we have been there for them and yet they may not respond in kind like, oh I appreciate you for doing this, or Oh I think you've really changed me because you've been steadfast. No kid's going to tell you to your face, hey Mr. Smith, you've totally changed my life right then by that action you took with me. And in fact, but the fact X, Y, Z, it doesn't happen that way. So much of a teacher's job and a real leader's job goes unrewarded and unrecognized visibly.

But you had this story that I just love and I'm wondering if you might be able to share it, which is the student, Johnny, not student rather, but this homie, Johnny. And he asks you for money and there's a connection to this theme of being the bridge. Is this a story that you can recall or that you can share because it's about that disappointment that can hit the mentor when their effort seems to get rejected.

Father Greg Boyle:

Let's see. Oh is it about the bridge?

Nat Damon:

Yes. And he's asking for money and you're like, I love you, but-

Father Greg Boyle:

Can I use language?

Nat Damon:

You can use language. This is a podcast, no network.

Father Greg Boyle:

Yeah. So what happened was, this is a kid I have a lot of history with and then we had to say, well you need rehab because you're smoking meth. And so it's back and forth, back and forth texting, and then jaw-droppingly he said, Hey, can you kick me down with money? And I thought, well son, we've been trying to get you into rehab and I love you, you're my son and the day won't ever come when I don't love you anymore. And I know you've burned all your bridges with your family and all the people you love, but I'm telling you right now you will never burn the bridge that exists between me and you. And I sent it, he wrote me back right away, fuck your bridge.

And I just died laughing. On the one hand you feel like, oh, shit. That's a big sword in my heart. But with praise and blame, you have to treat it all the same. You take it in, you feel it. Ooh, that stinged, that's an owie. And then you step back and you can savor it. You can relish it. So then I have these homies who run the place and they were in my office and I was telling them that story and we were just howling with laughter. And then even I have to tell you, that was a long time ago, but even today it came up where one of the homies, he recalled it, which I hadn't thought about it in a long time. And that became the kind of this affectionate thing. So they would hug me and they'd whisper in my ear, fuck your bridge. And we knew exactly what... I'd go, oh my God, thank you.

Nat Damon:



Yes. Yes.

Father Greg Boyle:

And a homie did that to today because the word bridge came up about something, how do we do a bridge between this group and that, or something rather. And one of the homies remembered he goes, fuck your bridge. And again, we just fell on the floor. But anyway, for me it's not about how to will they return your love. That's the whole thing in life. Our sadness, it comes from our self-absorption. And then the minute you move outside it, you go, oh okay, this feels better. You don't feel better if you're not self-absorbed, if you choose that. And then you go, well now I'm other centered, then you become loving centered, and then you inhabit the truth of who you are. You love being loving. That's the truth of every human being. But a homie punctuated a conversation we had the other day. At the end he just said, life is removing the blindfold. And I said, I think you're right. But once the blindfold falls, what do you see? It's not wow, I screwed up or I've seen the error of my ways.

No, the blindfold falls and you see that you're unshakably good and then you inhabit that truth and then you become that truth, and then you're a powerful person in the world. Death can't even touch that. It's so huge. So then you find that thing and then you just say, well you discover your true self and loving and it's way beyond just not being self-absorbed. Then you don't care if somebody says fuck your bridge, then you don't care if a student leaves at the end of the year and he never turned around to say thank you. That's okay, I know my true self in loving and I love being loving. And so sometimes people say thank you and sometimes they don't and that's okay. Then you can be anchored in a no matter whatness.

Nat Damon:

Yes.

Father Greg Boyle:

Look, I love you and I'm never going to stop. So quit trying to make me stop because I'm never going to stop. But that's not so hard to understand because parents with their kids. That then all of a sudden, you had mentioned the word disappointment, then suddenly that's no longer part of your vocabulary. I don't know, but I don't know disappointment, I don't engage success, I don't measure. What's all the measuring about. You just love and do what you will.

Nat Damon:

This part of the conversation reminds me of a quote from The Whole Language of yours, which is one of the most comforting quotes I've heard in a long time, one of the most comforting passages that I've read in a long time. And I can imagine any student who hears it would immediately feel comforted. And it's, the quote is this, the problem isn't that God doesn't think we're good enough, but that we don't know how good we are. The problem isn't that God doesn't think we're good enough, but that we don't know how good we are. And-

Father Greg Boyle:

Yeah, I think that's always the case. And I bristle, I wince, I read something in the LA Times today about the juvenile hall system and somebody was saying, we're just trying to help kids become their best selves. And I go, I don't know why that kind of language just... I go, no, they're already great. A homie will say, how do I become a better man? I go, stop. You could not be one bit better.

Nat Damon:

Yes.

Father Greg Boyle:

Because once you know that, that's your truth, then you become that truth. You inhabit that truth.

Nat Damon:

Yes.

Father Greg Boyle:

But if it's about striving to be better tomorrow than I was today, then you're not seeing the truth. The blindfold hasn't fallen where you see your unshakeable goodness and then you live from your goodness, the homies here always say he's learned how to live his truth. And I know what that means. It means you're anchored in seeing yourself, I would say, as God does. And that's a helpful place to be, because then no bullet can pierce that. And no four prison walls can keep that out because it's just too huge. And so that's what resilience is. Your students will become sturdy, I always like to say sturdy, because the world is going to throw at them what it will, but this time they're not going to be toppled by it because they're sturdy in the face of very strong winds.

And the sturdiness is born of relational wholeness, because you were cherished you're now a strong person. You know how to enter the world and people have to leave here, otherwise other people can't come. And that's tough. But it happens. But then they just know who they are and there's nothing more powerful. And people have to learn, have to come to insights. I just had a homegirl in here who was just enraged at some guy that we hired and she goes, I'm going to hurt him. And I go, yeah, no you're not. You're going to figure out how to navigate this and you don't want to lose this job because it's paying your rent and it's feeding your kids. But you'll learn how to breathe the same air as this guy that you hate. That stuff comes up all the time around here.

Nat Damon:

The coexistence.

Father Greg Boyle:

Yeah. With enemies. So it's not about loving your enemies, it's deciding not to have any, that's way better.

Nat Damon:

And talk about literally putting that into practice, Father Greg at Homeboy, because you literally have enemies together under the same roof.

Father Greg Boyle:

Multiple, multiple, multiple enemies. You're going to make croissants with somebody you used to shoot at.

Nat Damon:

Oh Jesus.

Father Greg Boyle:

For sure.

Nat Damon:

Thank you for bringing us home by mentioning relational wholeness a moment ago because that's how we began this conversation. And that is a perfect way to wrap it up because relational wholeness, particularly focusing on three elements, lovingness, hope and belongingness, and those three being the topics that we talked about today. And I just want to share with you, Father Greg, as we conclude this conversation, this podcast, this conversation was a bit different than most of your conversations, which tend to happen to focus strictly on the community at Homeboy and how it came about and how you have rehabilitated thousands of young men and women through Homeboy Industries. This has really been about relating the culture and the ethos of Homeboy Industries to one's classroom, one's school environment. And I was really struck because there was another unique podcast that you were on fairly recently that the LA Public Library put out.

And it stood out to me so much because it was a former or current homie who is now an actor, a professional actor, successful actor. And he refers to you as Pops, pops, pops, pops. And this is a charismatic, anybody listening to this podcast, please listen to this other podcast as well, or better yet, watch it, because he's so charismatic. Both Father Greg is so charismatic and this actor, and the love that he shares with you, Father Greg, is really beyond words. It's so visible in that conversation and it's so beautiful and it's such a great testament to the relationship, the relational wholeness that you've created with him. And so I really, really advocate anybody listening to, to go over to that, it was the LA Public Library. You can just google it with Father Greg and just to see the power of that relational wholeness in that relationship with him and this former homie.

And I also just wanted to give you a moment to share with our listeners what is... Just how many people have walked through the door since 1988? What are your quick talking points, bullets, stats? Because it's one thing to hear this conversation and to imagine and envision what Homeboy is, but to really hear the numbers, to actually listen to some of the data is powerful in itself as well. So maybe just A, the number of people that have come in and out, the expanse of what Homeboy Industries covers in terms of its service to the LA community and anything else that just stands out.

Father Greg Boyle:

So we've been around for 34 years and we're the largest gang intervention rehab reentry program on the planet. So about 10,000 folks a year walk through our doors trying to reimagine their lives. The centerpiece is our 18 month training program and everybody wants to get in on that. We have 11 social enterprises, so restaurants and bakeries and Silkscreen and electronic recycling and that people move in phases and then they go and work in those places. So we serve the entire county. They're 120,000 gang members in LA County and 1100 gangs. And so that's big. I was just in Odessa, Texas and they have a hundred thousand people in all of Odessa, Texas. So they have more gang members than they have people. And then, so we have a thing called the Global Homeboy Network. So there are 300 programs in the United States modeled on Homeboy and loosely connected at what we call a partner program. And then there are 50 programs outside the country in Glasgow, Sydney, London, Guatemala City.

So we didn't want to airlift Homeboy and become the McDonald's of gang intervention program. So we ended up saying, well we'll help you start your program. So, that's how it works. And every summer for three days our partners gather here in Los Angeles the ones who can join us. And we share best practices and it's a community of places. So in San Diego there's Rise Up Industries, in Glasgow, Scotland, there's Brave Heart Industries and they have different little businesses, social enterprises anyway, but the idea is, you create a community of kinship such that God might recognize it. That's the whole aerial view.

Nat Damon:

You were just recently honored as well at Loyola High School for 50 years of your Jesuit heritage and 38 years I think with Homeboy or with 38 years being a priest. And that recognition, nothing can add, can be enough to recognize the work that you've done. And yet at the same time you're sharing your

wisdom that it's not about you, you did not do this work for you. The energy that comes out of your work is its own self-perpetuating energy. And it is to bring it back to the classroom, it's to take that main caveat that this is not about you, this is about what you create in an atmosphere of hope, belongingness, and love.

And there's no greater time than I would say, than the present to recalibrate what the classroom experience is for this generation who have gone through so much trauma the past three years, regardless of where and what context they all woke up to the daily death numbers from COVID, they all woke up to what's the CDC going to say or the LA County Board of Health going to dictate in terms of whether I can go to school today or whether I have to wear a mask or whether I have to keep six feet social distancing, whether I can't touch, whether I can't connect, whether I can't be and share space with my peers.

We are putting that in the rear view mirror, hopefully with a lock, a padlock and key that's thrown out the window so that we can move forward into a new way of schooling. And if we can take and extrapolate these tenants from Homeboy Industries into our school cultures and our school ethos and to have at the center of our school cultures a relational wholeness like they have at Homeboy Industries, the world would certainly be a much, much better place. So thank you so much Father Greg for your time today and for your just beautiful heart and that continues to extend around the world and certainly did in this conversation today. Thank you so much.

Father Greg Boyle:

Thank you. Happy to be with you.

Speaker 1:

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