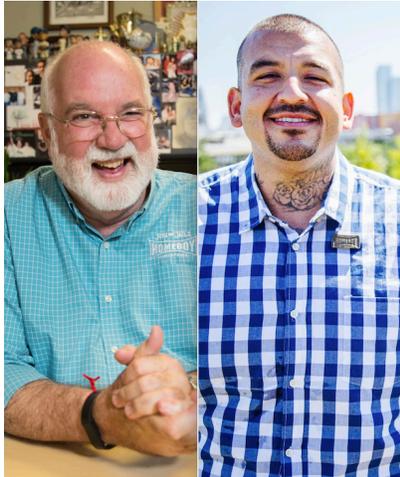


MASTERS Podcast Club, February 2020 Father Gregory Boyle and Jose Arellano Homeboy Industries: Hope Has an Address



Father Gregory Boyle founded Homeboy Industries, the world's largest gang intervention, rehabilitation, and reentry program. Despite death threats and hate mail in their first 10 years, Homeboy became a worldwide force that helps previously incarcerated men and women redirect their lives. Cycling in and out of juvenile hall and prison since age 15, former gang member **Jose Arellano** now serves as Homeboy's Director of Case Management.

Interviewed by **Winn Claybaugh**, Father Greg and Jose share heart-wrenching stories of formerly gang-involved members whose lives were changed by kinship and kindness.

FATHER GREGORY BOYLE

Winn: Hi everybody, Winn Claybaugh here, and welcome to this issue of MASTERS, which I know is going to be a little loud compared to what we're normally used to but we're in a very, very busy place, which we'll share with you why we're in this incredible place. But I'm sitting here with a wonderful man that I was introduced to a couple of months ago, but of course I've known about him for many, many years and have followed the work that he does and the causes that he supports and we have so much to learn from him in so many ways. So before we get started, I just want to welcome to MASTERS Father Greg Boyle. So welcome.

Fr. Greg: Thank you, it's good to be here.

Winn: First of all, we are sitting in this very, very busy place. Can you tell us where we're sitting and why it's so loud out there? What's going on here?

Boyle: Well, we're sitting in my office here at Homeboy Industries, which is the largest gang intervention rehab reentry program on the planet. Fifteen thousand folks a year walk through our doors trying to reimagine their lives, redirect their lives. So that counts for the relative noise and all the people out there.

Winn: It's also nice to be in your office right now. I wish we had a visual of this with all the photos. And right behind you is a photo of a beautiful man with his baby that says, "Love you." You have a lot to be proud of, this legacy that you

are building and creating is something that just must give you so much joy and so much purpose.

Fr. Greg: You know, it's funny, I don't have any control over my office any more. There's a homie who I think has taken it upon himself to curate this place so he'll put up photographs. I mean, all these are gifts from people so there's a kind of storehouse and they get changed every once in a while but a lot of babies, a lot of homies.

Winn: You could never move because how would you move all of this.

Fr. Greg: Yeah.

Winn: Right?

Fr. Greg: I don't know what; it's a museum piece now.

Winn: Well, I'm going to read a little bit here so our audience knows more about who you are. You are again, as you said, that largest gang intervention rehabilitation and reentry program in the world. And I like the fact that, even though you're based here in Los Angeles, the work that you do is worldwide, to teach other communities on how to establish this and how to create this. You are from the Los Angeles area, correct?

Fr. Greg: Yeah, I was born and raised here.

Winn: You've been a priest since 1984.

Fr. Greg: That's correct.

Winn: Did you know back then that this would be your calling? Did you know back then that—because you were originally assigned to one of the poorest communities in this Los Angeles area. Was that by choice? Did you request that or did you know that that was going to be your mission?

Fr. Greg: Actually, I did ask to do that because I had been in Bolivia, which kind of introduced me to the poor and the folks on the margins, and so that's what I wanted to do. And then I got sick. I had to come home and then I asked to come to the poorest place we had, which was Dolores Mission Church in the middle of the housing projects. It turned out they had eight gangs at war with each other, which is not very typical, in two public housing projects. The LAPD called it the largest grouping of public housing west of the Mississippi. So I started to bury kids. It was one of those, you know, you just kind of fall into it. We evolved as a program based on that and then just responded to things as they came. That was during what I called the decade of death, which was 1988 to 1998, and right in the middle of that in 1992, the county, we had a 1,000 gang-related homicides so we've cut that in half and then in

half again since then. But that was the peak, that was the height of the violence: shootings morning, noon, and night.

Winn: You were young. What was your first experience and exposure to—you said that there were eight gangs in that area. What was your first exposure to that? You said you started burying kids and—

Fr. Greg: In 1988 I buried my first young person. I've buried 231 since. So because—you couldn't ignore it. You couldn't just say, "Well, we're going to just concentrate on church on Sundays," or something. It started to become the thing. And of course in those days gangs were more indigenous. Gang members lived in the territory that they claimed. It's less true now. It's kind of almost more of a commuter reality. But in those days they lived in their turf.

Winn: I know you're really not into your bio and the accolades and the awards that you've received but just by mention, you have three books out, correct?

Fr. Greg: Two books.

Winn: Two books called *Barking to the Choir*, which I love that title: *Barking to the Choir*. [laughs] Where did you come up with that title, by the way?

Fr. Greg: Well, that was my second book and that was because in this office a homie who worked in the bakery came in and people had already told me he was late and had a bad attitude and was missing and he was starting to unravel a little bit and so I was kind of—he was standing right in front of my desk where you are and I was kind of running it down to him saying, you know, bringing this to his attention. He finally interrupted me and he says, "Relax, you're barking to the choir."

Winn: [laughs]

Fr. Greg: And I thought, *Well, that's the name of my next book—*

Winn: [laughs]

Fr. Greg: —*no matter what*. So the full title is *Barking to the Choir: The Power of Radical Kinship*. The first book is called *Tattoos on the Heart: The Power of Boundless Compassion*.

Winn: I was fortunate enough to have you speak at one of my events last May, eight months ago or so, and just such a profound impact that you had. And I didn't get a chance to talk to you after that. I mean, you spoke and then you disappeared, you vaporized. All of a sudden you were gone, which I thought was pretty clever. I want to learn how you do that.

Fr. Greg: [laughs]

Winn: What happened, though, was after you left, of course, nobody could speak and then once they could compose themselves to realize or to be able to verbalize what had just happened to that audience because of your message and your impact, then it was like, well, he's gone; what are we going to do? We have to do something. And then the next day, of course, they passed the plates and \$30,000 later. You have that impact on people because of the message that you deliver. I've always said that the best teachers, the best mentors, the best heroes, the best changemakers are storytellers. You're a storyteller. And the stories that you have are just so, so profound. When did storytelling become a part of the mission, so to speak?

Fr. Greg: Well, early on I knew that the way to kind of connect to gang members was by visiting them locked up. And so in those days we had 25 different detention facilities. There are fewer now, thank goodness, but in those days as a priest I would visit them and say mass. And so you give a homily of seven to ten minutes and I always had three stories—

Winn: Okay.

Fr. Greg: —gleaned from riding my bike in the middle of the night in the housing projects. And so they were all stories about gang members because I felt like they were stories that my audience would connect with. So then I had a storehouse of so many stories people said, "Gosh you should write a book." So maybe at some point I thought maybe I would write homilies to put the three stories, but then I threw that out and so I just wrote these books, which are kind of more essays and each chapter had a kind of a thematic notion and then I just have a storehouse of stories; so two books full. The thing with stories is anytime with an audience you want to get them to laugh, you want to get them to think and move beyond the mind they have, and you want to get them to cry. If you do all those things—you don't want to do just one of those things or even two of those things—

Winn: All three.

Fr. Greg: All three is kind of key, no matter how much time you're given. You know, if you're given 10 minutes or an hour.

Winn: The message that you delivered with my group, which I guess was an hour, and you absolutely did those three things. Coming over here, several people, knowing that I was going to be interviewing you, said, "Oh my God, you are so lucky." "Oh, I love Father Greg." "I love a priest who drops the f-bomb."

Fr. Greg: *[laughs]*

Winn: I hope I'm okay to say that *[laughs]*

Fr. Greg: I don't do it deliberately but I always do it as—

Winn: Part of the story.

Fr. Greg: All my stories—you know, I didn't say it, that kid said it.

Winn: *[laughs]* You're just repeating the story.

Fr. Greg: And I'm just repeating it.

Winn: Yeah, well again, love the stories. My underlying message or what I know I'm going to get out of this is in asking you to deliver a message to the corporate world. Yeah, I work a lot in the nonprofit world and there are several charitable organizations and causes, including yours, that I'm passionate about, but I also work a lot in the corporate world. I run my own corporation but then I speak to other corporations and just being able to deliver the message that if you live in a community—I think it's what you said, "It wasn't just about church on Sunday, it was about what are we going to do outside of the building to make a difference." And I think businesses need to have that same message, too. You can't just be a consumer in that community. You can't just be take-take-take, buy my goods, buy my services, and not turn around and give back. And I'm looking to you for that message. I know a lot of corporations that follow you and that support Homeboy Industries and I think that that message needs to go out there even more, on the responsibility that we have as businesses to make a difference in our communities.

Fr. Greg: You know, I try to turn things on its head a little bit because even the notion of make a difference—ought we to go to the margins to make a difference? Or should we go to the margins so that the folks at the margins make us different? Then all of a sudden you turn the thing on its head, which is kind of the hope. Homeboy wants to be the front porch of the house everybody longs to live in so it's a place of kinship and connection. Everybody belongs. There is no us and them. If you look at the place, it's filled with different races and any single gang member here has multiple, multiple enemies and rivals. People they used to shoot at, they're now making croissants with. So that's kind of the micro level. The macro level is an invitation. What if we were to invest in people rather than incarcerate our way out of our problems?

Winn: You talk about living on the margins here and I've heard you say—I have so many quotes from you: "Sometimes we'll be lucky enough to stand with the easily hated."

Fr. Greg: Easily despised and the readily left out, yeah. That's kind of, I think, where you need to gravitate. It's about standing with the demonized so that the demonizing will stop. And you stand with the disposable so that the day will come when we stop throwing people away. And part of that is to stand with the easily despised and the readily left out and you see that as a privilege, a great gift to be able to do that.

Winn: How has it changed your life? And when you entered the ministry, was it your attitude that I'm here to save them and to fix them?

Fr. Greg: Oh yeah, definitely. And people burn out because it's about them. It's about me wanting to save or even make a difference. That leads to burnout.

Winn: How and when did that start to change for you?

Fr. Greg: Very specific, it's like six years in when I was starting to burn out and didn't sleep and on my bike in the middle of the night in the housing projects. I had this experience of a guy named Lulu. He was a gang member, drug addict. Well, he was a drug dealer until he started to become his own best customer. He was selling drugs and then he was getting high and then all of a sudden I said, "Hey, you need help," and finally he agreed. So I drove him to a mountaintop, a rehab, and 30 days later his younger brother, also a gang member and drug addict, did what gang members rarely ever do: he put a gun to his head and killed himself. Gang members are more likely to walk into harm's way and hope to die. So I called Lulu, told him about it, he was devastated, and I said, "Well, I'm going to pick you up and bring you to the funeral but I want to bring you right back to the rehab." He goes, "I want you to because I like how this feels." So I went in and I picked him up and hugged and he gets in the car and he launches into a story about a dream he had had the night before. And in the dream he and I were in this large room but it was pitch black: no illuminated exit signs, no light creeping under the door, absolutely totally pitch black but he knows somehow that I'm in the room with him though we are silent. And then in the silence and in the darkness I have a flashlight and I aim it at the light switch but again I don't say a word and he says, "I know I'm the only one who can turn that light switch on. I'm really happy that you happen to have a flashlight." So he follows the beam of light, which I'm holding steadily on the light switch. He gets to the light switch, he takes a deep sigh, 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, with this voice of incredible discovery, "The light is better than the darkness." Like he didn't know that to be the case. And he said, "I guess my brother just never found the light switch." Well, I've never had a moment like that in my life where, in an instant, it just changed [*snaps fingers*]. It changed how I lived. I thought, *Ahhh, I've been trying to turn the light switch on for people*. No you can't do that. Own a flashlight, know where to aim it; that has to be enough for you. And then suddenly it was. And so I've never been even near burnout since that moment just because I just turned the whole thing on its head. I just did it differently. Then it's not about me, it's about holding the flashlight. So I kind of have a hairy eyeball when it comes to self-care or when people say, "Oh my gosh, I guess I'm just so compassionate, this is so hard, this work is so hard to do." I go, "No, you're doing it wrong. It's about you. Don't let it become about you." But the minute it's other-centered, you're halfway there. The moment it becomes loving centered, that you love being loving, well, then you'll never burn out. It's eternally replenishing; will always be.

Winn: Based on that message, what's the advice that you give then to a corporation? Because when a corporation does fundraising, obviously they want the press for it, which I think is great because then it inspires other people to become donors and contributors and volunteers. But how does a business make it not about them and more about, as you say, "Putting that flashlight onto the light?"

Fr. Greg: I don't know. Corporations are people, too. Is that how that goes? I mean, I just buried a kid who died of an overdose and I've known him for 33 years. But for all his struggles, he knew that a self-absorbed person will be stuck in sadness, but an other-centered person finds happiness, but a loving-centric person knows what real joy is. So that's the kind of the gradation that I think makes sense around here. That's the idea, you know? And for all his struggle, he kind of—this kid knew that. He was just a joyful person. Now, he had other struggles besides, obviously, but he kind of had that secret, which I think is remarkable. But that's the key to keeping burnout at bay. But I kind of don't tolerate it around here too much. Once I had a homie who was a Navigator, who was saying, "I just think I'm too compassionate." I go, "No you don't." It just means you have fallen for it, the notion that you're there to save people, rescue people, fix people. Nope. Can you delight in them? Can you receive them? I remember a guy—I think I might have mentioned this in my talk with you guys—but for me it's always been the image. A guy in Houston who works with gang members, who's a former gang member himself, and he says, "How do you reach them?" meaning gang members. And I found myself saying, "Well, for starters stop trying to reach them. Can you be reached by them?" Well, suddenly you've turned it on its head. Now, can that work for a corporation—corporations that allow themselves to be reached by the poor, by those on the margins, by the easily despised, by the readily left out? How do corporations allow themselves to be reached? Their presumption is, *We're so resource heavy that only the poor and the folks on the margins will benefit from our largesse*. Yeah, not so much. How do you allow yourself to be reached? I remember another young woman in Chicago, a senior at a university, and I was talking about the margins, going to the margins, that that's where the joy is. And she said, "I'm afraid to go to the margins," and I said, "Why?" And she said, "I'm afraid I won't fit in." And then I found myself saying to her, "If it's about you, you'll always be afraid." I don't even know how that frog kind of leapt out of my mouth but I thought, *No, I think that's true. I think that's the source of fear is when you've allowed it to become about you, that's what's going to happen*.

Winn: You travel quite a bit and I know that you travel oftentimes with your homies. You bring them on the road with you and for some of them I'm sure it's the first time that they've been on a plane or even left the neighborhood, correct?

Fr. Greg: Mm-hm.

Winn: Tell some of the stories—and I've heard many of them—some of the stories of giving them that stage, of putting them in front of huge audiences to transform that audience with their incredible, beautiful, raw messages.

Fr. Greg: So I don't want to tell a story that I know you've already heard.

Winn: Oh, I have a huge, huge audience here and I could hear your stories—

Fr. Greg: Yeah but, but I could—

Winn: It's like going to a concert with your favorite band and they don't play your favorite song.

Fr. Greg: *[laughs]*

Winn: I want you to tell me my favorite stories.

Fr. Greg: Yeah, but it's sort of against my religion to tell somebody—to repeat my story. There was kind of a new one, I guess, because I do it so often. I had two guys, an African American and a Latino, and they were enemies, they used to shoot at each other. So we are in the car together going to LAX and they are silent. I think, *Oh my God, this is going to be a long trip.* Then one of them, Jose, was—we were lined up. It was Southwest Airlines so the A-listers, which I am just because I fly so much, and they were kind of in the next thing and Jose has sort of a loud-ass voice and Jose goes, “Hey G,” and everybody turns and looks and I'm, *Oh my God.* “Can I turn my phone to airplane mode?” And I'm trying to quiet him down and I go, “Well, you can still use your phone right now and even on the plane you can use it until they close the doors, then you have to turn your phone to airplane mode.” And he turns to a total stranger, a woman, and he goes, “I've never done airplane mode before.” Well, he was so exhilarated and she kind of looks at him like, *Oh great.* And I always thought, well, he's sort of inviting us to the infinite now, to kind of be delighted in the present moment, and I like that. So then we gave six talks in Chicago. And I'm an introvert so I need my space so at one point I said, “Hey let me drop you off at Navy Pier; they have a lot of stores; you can buy stuff for your womenfolk and your kids. Well, they go to this thing called Build a Teddy, where you build a teddy bear, and you can kind of specify it or something and what they are wearing. And then you can record your voice and so he—so they came back to me and they both did this and Jose said, “I bought this for my lady, what do you think?” And you push the paw and the voice comes out and it's his voice that he has recorded and it says, “I love you with all my heart, baby. Come here. Give me a kiss.” That's what he recorded. “Do you think she'll like it?” I go, “Oh my God, she'll love it.” So the next day we are leaving and so they buy too much crap and it's hard to—he's trying to zip it into his bag. Every two minutes the bear is going off: “I love you with all my heart, baby.” TSA: “I love you with all my heart baby.” He's shoving it in the overhead compartment: “Come here. Give me a kiss.” We're

dying laughing. So then we're driving from LAX back to Homeboy and Jose's in the back seat and he says, "You know what my favorite part of this whole trip was?" I said, "No what?" And he pats Larry, the African American, on the arm and he says, "Being with him." So they had these, whatever it was, three and a half days, it was a long trip relative to what I normally do, and they were moments to kind of—you can't demonize people you know. So they shared a hotel room and they told their stories in front of each other, in front of big audiences. Stories of terror and torture and violence and abuse. And they found their kind of common connection in their torturous stories, and so it was really beautiful to behold.

Winn: So Homeboy trains—it says more than 300 former gang members every year but you said that 12,000 people a year are walking through the doors.

Fr. Greg: Yeah. So some are in the 18-month training program and others are here for classes, tattoo removal, therapy, NA, AA. Or they're in the chute: they're in the process, which takes some time: drug testing, orientation, selection committee.

Winn: And to be one of those 300, what are those qualifications?

Fr. Greg: For the guys you have to be a gang member. But women, they'll say that they're 5 to 10 percent but the truth is they're closer to 3 percent. So we've expanded the definition of the females who can come in here. You have to be a felon because if we said you have to be a gang member we wouldn't be able to have enough females in here.

Winn: Okay. And you said the process for them is 18 months and during those 18 months they're employed, they're also going through the classes—

Fr. Greg: Yeah. It's a paid gig so they'll come in and they'll get something. They have what we call kinship grants, which is when they're in therapy and classes so they get paid for that. And then the other one is they just clock in and work and train in one of our nine social enterprises.

Winn: I'm curious to know—because you serve women as well—I'm curious to know what happens with their children. How are their children taken into consideration while they are going through this process and stories that you have about that or advice that you have about that?

Fr. Greg: A great many of them have had their kids taken away so they just—unspeakable pain about that kind of part of their lives. So they're kind of working their way back. At every morning meeting during the announcements time, you're always getting somebody saying, "I got my kids back yesterday," and people are sobbing and clapping so it's quite wonderful. But they've all had hiccups. They've all been to prison, they've all had real difficulties and so this place helps them reunite with their kids in their lives and so it's all restorative all around. But you know, you break the cycle. They come here

and this is kind of a sanctuary and then they become the sanctuary that they sought and then they go home and they present that sanctuary to their kids and then suddenly you've broken a cycle.

Winn: I was told to ask you topics that you are passionate about, kinship being one of them.

Fr. Greg: Spiritually speaking, I think kinship is God's dream come true: that we be one. That there be no daylight that separates us. There's no us and them, there's just us. So that's the idea. That's the hope around here. So what happens, it's just in a micro-level here, rival enemy gang members working side by side with each other. We always want that to be some announcement of a new way of imagining. Here we talk about kind of a mystical fluency. There's a mysticism here, which is—and that's our, I think, our core competency. We're a place that sees the wholeness in people and a lot of places don't. I had a homie who was Russian and I went to testify; they were going to try to deport him to Uzbekistan; they ended up not doing it. But he grew up in a Latino gang turf and he got into a gang. So when I came back to the office after testifying I asked a guy who I knew was from his gang, I said, "Do you know this guy?" He goes, "Oh gosh of course, we call him Russian Boy and, oh, I love that guy," he said. "In fact, we were cellies at county jail and he'd go out into the hall," this homie was telling me, "and he'd get on the payphone and he'd talk to his mom and they spoke Russian." Then he said, "Damn G, they spoke the whole language"—

Winn: *[laughs]*

Fr. Greg: —which I loved as an idea. In fact that's the name of my third book; I haven't written yet, but that's the name of it and it's called, *The Whole Language: The Power of Extravagant Tenderness*. The idea about the whole language is what if we spoke the whole language? What if we were fluent in tenderness? That the whole language is about being tender and about seeing people in their wholeness rather than just looking at their rap sheet or fixating on the worst things they've ever done. But if you see the person in their totality, that's the whole language. That's what you hope for is that kind of mystical fluency.

Winn: I was also told to ask you about complex trauma.

Fr. Greg: Yeah. We would call this place a trauma-informed place. There is the ACES, which is the Adverse Childhood Experiences Study, and there's a scale of one to 10. Experts will say if a kid or adult or anybody checks off four to five of that 10 list—a parent was in prison, violence in the home, mental illness in the home, sexual abuse, physical abuse, it's a list of 10—so they say if you are a four or five, that's kind of alarming. You're going to have a hard time socializing and you will have actual physical health issues. Everyone who walks through these doors is a nine or 10 on the ACES; every single one.

Now, I grew up in the city; I'm a zero on the ACES. I can't check off any one of those 10 things; not one. And so what does that mean and what does that say? That's not making me morally superior to the thousands who walk through our doors; quite the opposite. It's just kind of random. I won the lottery, the zip code lottery, the parent lottery, the mental health lottery; the list is long. And then there are the folks here who have just had to carry way more than anybody else. Once you know that, then that's a game changer. Once you know that, that's kind of how things just alter forever.

Winn: What do you see for yourself in the future? Again, you're out there teaching other communities on how to create and build similar type missions and organizations.

Fr. Greg: Yeah. We have the global Homeboy network so we have 146 programs modeled on this model, on our program, and then 16 outside the country modeled on Homeboy. So we foster that, we nurture that. We gather every year, every August, for three days to share about it. I give a lot of talks because I feel like the message is an important one and you want people to embrace this: that little by little you make progress in kinship and connection and the invitation is that everybody speak the whole language in the end.

Winn: As we start to wrap things up I want to read this. "We imagine no one standing outside of the circle, moving ourselves closer to the margins so that the margins themselves be erased." Something that you said and that's your purpose, that's your mission.

Fr. Greg: I think a lot of times we want to focus on worthy goals like peace, justice, and equality. And yet the truth of those things is that you can't ever have peace, justice, or equality unless there's an undergirding sense of kinship that we belong to each other, no matter how hard you try. Peace, justice, and equality are byproducts of our kinship. So work for kinship and you'll get those things and that's how it works, I think.

Winn: To wrap things up, do you have final message for the thousands of people who get to listen to this to learn more about you and learn more about the mission that you have?

Fr. Greg: Well, I think going to the margins is—you don't do it because it's the harder thing or the better thing, you do it because it's a selfish thing. That's where the joy is, is at the margins. People don't know that. They think it's just somehow a grim duty but that's where the joy is so you want people to walk towards joy, because once they do, it changes their lives. I think when people go to the margins, what they discover is, *Wow, I had no idea. This really is where the life is.* But it's also where the margins get erased. If enough people stand out at them then they disappear and that's what you hope. Pope Francis says that the only world worth building is a world that includes everyone. I think that's true.

Winn: Beautiful. I can add nothing to that.

Fr. Greg: Okay. Thank you.

Winn: Thank you so much, I appreciate it.

Fr. Greg: It was a privilege being with you.

JOSE ARELLANO

Winn: Hi everybody, Winn Claybaugh here, continuing this wonderful message about Homeboy Industries and I'm sitting here with Jose Arellano. How was my accent?

Jose: That's about right, Arellano.

Winn: Arellano.

Jose: Arellano.

Winn: Okay, well. *[laughs]*

Jose: Some people say Arellano. Arellano is, I think, proper.

Winn: I had the chance to interview Father Greg from Homeboy Industries and we got to hear a little bit of his story but you're the beneficiary of what Father Greg has created, which is why I wanted to also interview you to give our audience an education on what Homeboy does, not just in the Los Angeles area but worldwide because there is a great outreach program. And all good ideas come with a story. All good causes happen because there was a story. People raise money for cancer because they lost a loved one to cancer. People raise money for a cause because they have a personal tie to that. I lost a brother to suicide so of course we started a nonprofit to address mental health and suicide prevention. And you have a story and that's what I want to get into, is your story. But I want to tell our listeners a little bit more about who you are. Jose was born in Southern California, just east of Los Angeles—and I'm reading this. Growing up he and his family moved around Los Angeles County a lot. You enjoyed and excelled in school and were placed in the gifted and talented education program at a very young age. Actually I'm going to have you tell your story even better but you were cycled in and out of a juvenile hall and prison until you heard about Homeboy Industries and now you're actually the Director of Case Management at Homeboy Industries, which we're going to talk a little more about. So let's just get into your story here. To say that you were put into gifted programs and education at school, that was a good start.

Jose: Yeah.

Winn: Right? So just tell us a little bit more about that.

Jose: I loved school, growing up. I just—I loved school. Even to this day I'm always fascinated with learning new things. But back then, the reason why I loved school so much was because I hated being home. Growing up—I was sharing a little bit—my family were all born in this country: grandparents, mother. So I guess, trying to like fit in with being Mexican American but not Mexican American because we didn't migrate from Mexico. We're actually Native American and my ancestors go back to the original tribe of the Los Angeles basin, which is called the Tongva, also known as the Gabrielino tribe. My ancestors built the missions in Los Angeles. But also growing up really poor and kind of being ashamed of being poor and being ashamed a little bit about my heritage, I wanted to fit in with the Mexican American culture. And then having this name that I didn't identify with, because I didn't know the man that had given me this name. So growing up, I grew up and I didn't know my mom was my mom until I was about nine. I thought she was my sister because my grandparents were raising me as their child. But I was excited when I found out she was my mom because I looked up to her as an older sister and I loved the way she was. She was bold, courageous; she was smart, she was funny, she was witty. And so when I found out she was my mom I was just like, I was happy, I was excited about life. And she was a young gang member. And so that relationship, from the beginning, was rocky just because she was a young gang member trying to figure out life. She was looking for love in all the wrong places and then she fell in love and she had another child, which was my sister, and it was like the same story over and over again. These men that she would meet would eventually leave us or they would stick around and it wasn't always as healthy as it should have been.

Winn: What does that mean that she grew up in gang life? What did that look like for your mother? At what age was she a part of the gang life?

Jose: I don't know the age. I think maybe she got jumped into, from the stories I heard, like when she was around 15 or 16. My grandparents—so we're generational gang-involved. My grandparents were from the original neighborhood and then my mother eventually came up under them and we've just been gang-involved since—from the stories I heard, since my grandparents. And them not particularly being from a gang but growing up in that culture and then my mom actually being officially jumped into a gang.

Winn: What does it mean to be jumped into a gang?

Jose: You get beat up. You get beat down. If you get jumped into a hardcore gang, like a real gang, the beating is pretty brutal. And then after you get hugged and embraced and welcomed to be a part of this kind of twisted idea of love. I'll share my experience with it as I kind of get into my story. Growing up, I

looked up to my mom and kind of wanted to follow her. I wanted to just be with her, to be honest. I just wanted to be in the presence of her but she was caught up in other things and so eventually she got addicted to drugs. She started dabbling and dabbling at first but now that I look back she was in so much pain, too, that I guess she kind of succumbed to the addiction of drugs. And so the more she became addicted to drugs, the poorer we got. My grandfather eventually passed away, I was about 12 years old, and then we lost the house that he had bought. So I ended up being raised by my grandmother and my mother at times, whenever she was there. But pretty much we were on our own. There wasn't a male that really was around to help out in any way, neither financially, so we became really poor; we started to move around a lot. I had an older cousin and he was like a brother to me. His circumstances were similar as well but he was wise beyond his years. He was just very special and amazing; gifted as well. And one day we go to my grandmother's backyard and he tells me, he goes, "Look it, no matter what happens we're not going to get jumped into the gang. We're not going to get in." We're about 11 years old and he asks me to shake and promise him that no matter how hard it gets we're never going to get in. We grew up fast so we kind of understood what was happening around us. I shook his hand and we promised each other that no matter what happened we would never get jumped into a gang.

Winn: You were the same age?

Jose: He was about a year and a half older than me.

Winn: Okay.

Jose: So we ended up moving around a lot. We started to move and my cousin—the summer right before junior high school—my cousin got jumped into the hood out of nowhere. He didn't come and talk to me about it. We didn't have a conversation about it. It was just from one day to the next he was jumped into the hood.

Winn: A decision; a choice he made?

Jose: A choice he made.

Winn: Okay.

Jose: And it changed things, you know? It changed our relationship. Now he's in the hood; he's in the streets. He would come to my house sometimes late at night on his bike but he was pretty much a gang member now and that was it. That was the choices he made. But I had another friend that lived down the street from me. By this time, my mom was full blown in her addiction. I didn't have a curfew growing up so I never had to worry about what time I had to be home. I could be out until whatever time I wanted to. And like I told you, I hated being home and that's why I loved school so much during this time because

being somewhere else besides being at home was like peace for me because at home was so chaotic, like alcoholism. The uncles I did have were cycling in and out of the system, were either in jail or getting out of jail, on drugs, very violent. The people that my mom was bringing to the house—my house was the hangout spot and I hated being there.

Winn: Did you have a younger sister there as well?

Jose: I did. By this time I had two younger sisters and two younger brothers. There were five of us in total. At times my mom would try to make things work with my younger brothers' dad so she wouldn't even live with us during that time. During the time of the summer right before junior high school, they had kind of left and kind of started a little family with my younger brothers' dad. So they were gone and I'm at the house with my grandmother, coming in and out of the house, just doing pretty much whatever I wanted. I didn't have anybody really looking after me. I used to go to my friend Christian's house, who lived down the street. And because I didn't have a curfew I used to overstay my welcome so I'd stay there until ten-thirty, eleven o'clock at night, and his mom used to always have to ask me to leave like, "Hey Jose, it's getting late, you guys got school in the morning." It would be on a weekday and I'd be there until twelve if I could. And so she would have to ask me to leave. And I never really felt bad about that. I would just leave. If she would ask me, I would leave. This is around the time in the '90s where methamphetamine had become kind of like a plague in my neighborhood; in places I was growing up in, a lot of people were getting hooked on it. My mother had eventually tried it and got hooked on it and so things were bad at the house. Things were bad. And so I go to Christian's house and I go there and knock at the door and somebody comes to the peephole but they didn't answer. So I go to the side window and I knock at the side window and I say, "Hey, it's me, Jose," and they turned off the living room light and then they turned off the TV and they pretended like nobody was home. I remember just thinking, *Damn, they don't want me here, they don't want me here*, and I didn't want to go home. I hated it at my house. By this time a lot of things I didn't understand were starting to build in me, like resentments towards my mom, resentments towards us being so poor, and my life. And so I left with my head down and I walked back up to the top of the hill. And mostly all of my family were all from the same gang: cousins, uncles. So I get to the top of the hill and another one of my cousins is there and he's about 16 at the time and there's another homie there who's about 19. And I guess I had sadness on my face because the homie, he asks me, "Hey, why you look so sad? Did your dog die or something?" I tried to maintain my composure and I said, "I'm not sad, I'm alright." I remember he looks at me and he says, "You want to get jumped into the hood?" And before I could even realize that the words had left my mouth, I had said, "Yeah."

Winn: And you were how old?

Jose: I was 12. And I said, "I'll get in tonight" and silence. I remember my cousin who was 16 giving me this look of like, I wouldn't say it was concern, but it was like this look of understanding, that I had reached this point in my life, that it was going to happen, that he had probably come across himself. This look of deep understanding and we didn't say anything to each other. We walked across the street where my other cousin had lived and we went into her garage and they just started beating on me. They started punching on me, I fell on the ground; they started kicking me. I got back up, they punched on me some more and kicked me and then after, they hugged me.

Winn: How long did that last; the beating?

Jose: It lasted 13 seconds. And after they had beat on me, they hugged me and they embraced me and they told me that they loved me. I look back on it now and it was this tainted, fissured, fractured idea of love but for whatever reason, in that moment, I felt like, *Yeah, this is where I'm supposed to be at right now*. And my cousin, who was 16, he goes into the house and he comes out with a pair of pants. And these pants, they were Ben Davis and they were permanently creased and they were pants that gangsters used to wear back then. And I remember he hands me the pants and he says, "Try these on." I put them on. They were big, they were like three times my size, and I put them on and he looks at me and says, "Man, those look good on you." He says, "You can use those pants." And I felt like a little warmth in my heart. I felt like, *Damn, this fool cares about me*. After he looks at me for a little while and he says, "You know what, homie? You can have those pants." I felt in that moment like that I was something, that I was somebody to somebody, and then I became a gang member. And that decision changed the course of my life.

Winn: How did your life change after that?

Jose: School was out for me. It was pretty much—I started school with those pants and I started school being from a gang and growing up in the '90s there was just so many different gangs at war with each other. Walking to school was a danger to my life. Walking home from school was a threat to my life. I got jumped right off the bat going to school. Walking home from school, I got jumped pretty bad. But the biggest thing that happened was, eight months after I got jumped into my neighborhood, my cousin Marlo, who we promised each other in the backyard that we would never get jumped into the gang, he was shot in the face with a 12 gauge shotgun. He was murdered. He was 14 years old when he died. That was an experience that really shifted my perception on life. I loved him dearly, like a brother. My son Vincent has his name now, so my son's name is Vincent Marlo and I gave him that name in honor of my cousin Marlo, who was murdered. I just think that he was an amazing human being and he would have done great things had he been given the opportunity. So these experiences, they started to shape me. They started to shape the way I saw the world and ultimately the way I saw myself

in the world. I thought life was a dangerous place to be and I just started to learn things, like this is what a gang member does. This is how we live. I remember being at his car wash—we did a car wash because we couldn't afford his funeral—and you couldn't say that you were sad, you couldn't talk about—like I knew him as a kid, as a brother, as a cousin, but they knew him as a gang member and retaliation was talked about. And I remember being at the car wash and going like, *I remember we used to bury army men in the dirt outside my grandmother's house*. Things like that I missed about him but those things weren't shared with anybody because we were gang members and we weren't supposed to talk like that and we weren't supposed to talk about those things. We were supposed to be hard. We were supposed to be tough. We weren't supposed to cry. And so what's a trip is this: years later, I want to say maybe two or three years ago, I was in this writing workshop class at Homeboy and they asked us to write a story from our childhood and I wrote a story about Marlo. It just came out of nowhere. I had forgotten about this. I wrote that after he had died I used to go into my grandmother's yard and I used to look for the army men we had buried and I couldn't find them. But I never shared that with anybody because I was a gang member already. I just kept it to myself. I would go into my grandmother's yard and I would look for these army men and that didn't come up for me until years later, decades later, and it was in a writing workshop at Homeboys. But these things I had begun to bury—this pain, like the absence of not having a father, the stuff I was struggling with, with my mother—I started to bury them deep within. I started to put this mask on and I started to tighten the mask and I learned from those around me on how to talk, how to walk, how to conduct myself because I didn't want to be hurt. But the whole time I was creating a character that was going to eventually hurt me the most. And so I got locked up at 15—

Winn: For what?

Jose: For selling drugs. I got out four months later and then I got locked up again at 16 for a gang-related incident and I didn't get out until I was 18. Got out at 18 and went to prison at 18. Got out when I was 22. Got out for five months at 22 and went right back to prison for another six years. I had lost myself completely; didn't know who I was. I was this character I had created. I was this gang member and I was this person that lived like this and that nothing hurt him and nothing bothered him. This was my life. I remember being in juvenile hall and my mom couldn't visit me back then because she was in her addiction. Kids were getting visits; they would call their names out and I would be in my cell and I remember saying to myself like pushing everything, burying it deep saying, *This is your life, homie. This is the hand you were dealt and we're going to live this out. We're going to live this hand until you die and hopefully death comes soon*. And I began to pursue death.

Winn: So between juvenile and prison you spent a total of how many years?

Jose: Over a decade.

Winn: Over a decade.

Jose: Yeah. The last two, back to back, being the longest stretch where it was four years and six years, back to back. I would say almost five months in between those two terms.

Winn: Wow.

Jose: But this is where my story changes and it came from one of my darkest moments. So the relation with my mom became so estranged. I remember homies used to tell me, "Hey, your mom's over here and she's getting high. You should probably come check on her" and I would look at them and I would say, "I don't have a mom, homie. I don't have a mother." I was so hurt by her. It was an experience. Once again, going back to I believe that our experiences, they shape us and they shape the way we see ourselves. I remember I started to get high with my mom and wherever we were at it became like the gang hangout. Any place we lived became the hood spot. I remember she was asking people to try meth and a lot of younger homies were in there and I remember her coming out with it and I was looking at her like, *Ask me, pick me. I want to be a part of your life*, and she skipped me and asked everybody else to try it. I had another homegirl there and I remember tapping her, going like, *Hey, tell her I'll try it*.

Winn: How old were you?

Jose: I was 14 and she was like, *You tell her*. Like, *Tell her*. And I told her and I said, "Hey, I'll try that." She's like, "Alright, you want to try this?" I was like, "I'll try it." And I remember trying it and for three days I was up on meth and for whatever reason it didn't click well with me. So three days later I remember feeling so bad that I had done it and I went back to that same homegirl and I told her, "Hey, I don't want to do this no more and I don't want my mom to do this drug no more." And I was like, "Would you talk to her for me?" She's like, "You talk to her. She's your mom. If you tell her how you feel I'm pretty sure she'll stop." I remember going to my mom and saying, "Hey, I don't like the way this made me feel and I don't want any of us to use this anymore." And my mom looked at me and said, "You're weak minded." She pretty much announced to the whole house, *He can't use meth no more because he can't handle it*. And I remember feeling like so hurt inside by her. I never, ever came to her again with anything that I have felt and I remember from that day on I never called her Mom again. And that was our relationship until she passed away. So I go to prison with this feeling of "This is my life and nothing's going to hurt me anymore." Just kind of shut down and disconnected from the world. I had just gotten to Lancaster State Prison and then I had got word that my mom had died and I remember—

Winn: How old was she?

Jose: She was in her 40s.

Winn: Died of addiction?

Jose: She died in her addiction, somehow. I think she had caught pneumonia or something. I remember feeling so hurt; like broken. Like I just wanted her and I would try to stuff it down because I was in prison and I had, by this time I probably had four more years to do and I was like, *Nope, can't feel that. Whatever this is it as to go back down deep within.* And I couldn't. It just kept coming up again and there was nothing I could do. I was getting high in there. I was drinking pruno in there. I was going to the hole. I was fighting. There was nothing I could do that was going to suppress this pain anymore. It just hurt so bad. Like I just wanted her. Then I had started to think, *How did I get here, to this place?* I remember my last SHU term, I was in the hole and there's these little tiny mirrors in the cell and I remember looking at myself in the mirror and I was all tatted on my face, my arms; I was sleeved down at the time. I remember looking at myself and then I looked at my reflection in the mirror and I go, "Who are you? Who are you and how did you get to this place? How did you get to this moment in life?" And I started to think about childhood. I started to go back and I remember being a little boy. There was a show that used to come on, it was called *Family Matters*. I used to watch that show when I was a little boy and I used to yearn to have what they had on the screen. I used to yearn for a father and a mother like that. I was broken and I was lost and I didn't want to die like that. So I started to pray and I started to think about what life could have been like and I remember being in the hole when I was praying and I was saying, "If there's anything else, if there's anything besides this, give me a glimpse of it and I promise you I'll change my life. I'll do something else." You hear stories in there about all kinds of things, and you don't believe everything you hear and you believe half of what you see. But I had heard a story about Father G briefly on the yard one day and this homie from East LA was talking about this priest that had helped him get a backpack and bought him some shoes for school and stuff. You kind of hear these stories and you go, "I never met a priest like that." But they stuck with me and I had met a beautiful woman, amazing woman, while I was incarcerated and we eventually got married and I paroled with her. And I remember coming home dealing with so many things that I didn't understand back then. I didn't understand at all what I was feeling inside. And I remember being in the supermarket and getting into an argument with her because I— you know where you have to pull the number, the tag to wait for the fresh meat? I used to say, "Why do you want to wait for this fresh meat? Why don't we just get the packaged meat and let's leave?" It's because I wasn't comfortable in the store but I never wanted to tell her that. I figured if I just work and get a job I'll be okay and I won't go back to prison. So I started to do that. I started working at factories in Vernon and Huntington Park and my father-in-law, he would come into the house and he would see me all dirty and one day he had a Spanish paper that was called *La Opinión* and there was an ad of Homeboy Industries in there. He hands it to me and we couldn't

really communicate because of my English and his Spanish, but he was like, “You should call them. Try calling them.” I was like, “You know what? I had heard about this a long time ago,” and I called. I say, “You know what, I’ll call.” I call and a homie named Eddie answered the phone and he said, “Hey, this is Eddie with Homeboy Industries. How can I help you?” And I go, “Well, I’m looking for a job. Are guys hiring over there?” He says, “Well, let me ask you a few questions.” I go, “Alright.” He says, “Have you ever been locked up before?” I’m like, “Yeah.” It’s kind of a strange question, you know—

Winn: *[laughs]*

Jose: —and I’m like, *yeah*.

Winn: Not a typical—

Jose: Not your typical interview question.

Winn: —interview, right.

Jose: And I said, “Yeah, I’ve been locked up before.” And he says, “You ever been involved in gangs?” And I’m like, “Yeah, I’m from a gang.” And he goes, “Are you on probation or parole?” I don’t know why but I told him, “Well, I’m actually on high-control parole.” He goes, “Alright, I got one more question for you: do you any visible tattoos?” And I remember looking at myself and, like I said, sleeved up, tatted up, my neck’s tatted; everything. And I said, “Yeah, I’m all tatted up, homie.” And he goes, “Well, yeah we’ll give you a job.” *[laughs]* And I remember getting the phone and holding it away from my ear going, “Did he just say what I thought he said?” And I go, “What’d you say?” And he said, “Yeah, we’ll give you a job. Can you come down here today?” I was like, “Are you serious, homie?” He’s all, “I’m serious, we’ll give you a job.” I said, “I’ll be down there today.” And I remember walking up to Homeboy Industries—and you’ve been there. So big window, you could see in. As soon as you get there you can immediately see inside. I remember seeing gang members everywhere and I looked at my wife—we count about it today—I looked at her and serious as a heart attack I said, “This place is not for me.” I was so afraid to be around other gang members and I didn’t even know that I was afraid. I was so afraid that something bad was going to happen because that’s all that happened in my life was something bad. I was waiting for the next shoe to drop. And she goes, “Just give it a shot. Just go in there and just see what they say.” I was like, “Alright.” I walk in and I get the intake form and I remember sitting down and I’m sitting up straight and I’m watching everybody, start to see people notice me. and I’m going through all these things in my system, in my mind. and I remember—you’ve been to the café, right?

Winn: Yes.

Jose: So do you know Mario? Mario, he's all tatted in the café. He has the most tattoos—

Winn: Right.

Jose: —yeah, he has the most tattoos I've ever seen anybody have in my life. Even has his eyelids tatted. So back then, years ago, he was a trainee. Well, they didn't call us trainees back then, we were junior staff. He was junior staff and he was on maintenance so he was walking around with a mop bucket or something and I noticed him notice me and that's all it took. I remember noticing him notice me and he starts to walk towards me and I put the clipboard down. Inside I'm thinking, *Well, here it is. Everything I expected to happen is going to happen now.* And the closer he gets to me, the more my heart begins to race. And then he walks up and he extends his hand to me and he says, "Hey, my name's Mario, I've never seen you here before. Would you like some water or something to drink?" I remember looking at him, going, *What are you talking about?* I had never been approached by a gang member and had an experience like that.

Winn: What did you think was going to happen?

Jose: I thought he was going to say, *Where are you from homie?* or *I know you from somewhere* and it was going to be immediately a collision. And he didn't. He said, "I've never seen you here before. Would you like something to drink? Would you like water?" That experience and many other experiences, they began to reshape the way that I saw things. They began to change me and I didn't even know I was being changed. I'll share this other experience with you. So I start working there. I get a job there and people are telling me they love me and they're saying, "Hey, I can't wait to see you tomorrow." And I'm leaving going, *Yeah, yeah, yeah, right.* I'm waiting to see the holes in this place. I'm watching. I'm watching, expecting to see that this is all just BS. How can you love me? I remember here was a homie that used to always tell me, "Hey, I love you," and in my mind I used to say, *"How can you love me, homie? My mother never loved me? I couldn't understand it.* So I was always leery, I was always vigilant, and I would leave. Anyway, I ended up going to my grandmother's and I got my little brother, he was my baby brother and he was about 14 when my mom had died so he ended up really having to fend for himself. I talked to Father G and I say, "Hey G, I located my brother. Do you think I could bring him?" And he said, "Sure, son. We'll get him enrolled in our school and we'll get him a part-time job. He can work here part time he can go to school part time." I was so happy. So I bring my brother. And my brother back then, he didn't speak. The only way he really knew how to express himself, was physically and violently. I didn't know why until years later why he didn't talk. He was just quiet and I used to always try to watch out for him. One day, we come into Homeboy's and the homie Eddie that had answered my call was at the front desk and he said, "Hey, Father G wants to

talk to you guys.” I remember looking at my brother going, *What did you do, homie? [laughs]*

Winn: *[laughs]*

Jose: We’re waiting in front of G’s office and then he calls us in and we sit down and—you see, back then we didn’t really have much and we used to share clothes. But see, people at Homeboy’s, they would see you, they would notice those things, and they would always try to help. But we were raised up to not accept anything from nobody because if you accepted it they could possibly want something from you in return. So I used to always tell my brother, “Don’t take nothing from nobody. We got each other; we’ll take care of each other.” I was a lot thinner back then. I was like 60 pounds thinner so if I had this shirt on today, my brother would wear it tomorrow. Whatever pants he had on, we would swap out and we would wear each other’s clothes. But people would notice that. So here we are in front of G’s office and he calls us in and we sit down in front of his desk and he has these two Sears cards. He reaches across his desk and he tries to hand them to us and we go, “Oh no, we’re good, homie. We don’t need anything.” He says, “Take this card, son.” We’re like, “We’re alright. For real, we’re good.” He goes, “Take these cards and go buy you guys yourself some clothes.” He forces us to take these cards and we take them and we’re leaving and we’re going down to Alameda and I look over at my little brother and my little brother is sobbing; he’s in tears. When we were growing up, I used to always tell him, “Don’t cry; don’t ever cry in front of anybody because it will show weakness and they’ll take advantage of you.” Here we are going down to Alameda and he’s sobbing uncontrollably. I look over at him and I go, “Why are you crying, homie?” He looks at me and he goes, “Why do they care about us?” He couldn’t wrap his head around it. I remember looking at him in that moment and I go, “You’re special and you’re worthy. They care about you because you’re a good dude.” I remember something shifted in me and I was like, *This real, this is real. There’s something special here and I want to be a part of it, even though everything inside of me is telling me not to. I want that. I want to be able to tell my brother that he’s special and that he’s worthy and that I love him and that he deserves it.* That was like a major shift in me. When I came back I was like, *I want to be a part of this place.* No matter how uncomfortable it feels, allowing somebody to tell me they love me, allowing somebody to help me, I’m going to do it. Because eventually I wanted to do that for somebody else. And my life started to change when, dramatically, I started to allow people in. I started to tell people about things that had happened and I started to heal from that pain. Then I started to realize that if I had went through all this and made these decisions in my life, imagine what my mom had went through. Imagine the things she was carrying. And I started to forgive her and I started to connect to her in ways I could never have imagined in life. I share this with people when I say, “As crazy as it sounds, my mother was able to give me in death what she wasn’t able to give me in life.” If my mom would have never died, I would have never had a chance at living. I would have never known

that pain. It sounds crazy, it might sound crazy to somebody to say that, but what she wasn't able to give me in life she was able to give me in death, and I found all that out at Homeboy's. When I came there it wasn't about me changing, it was about me being everything I was already created to be. It was about me removing these layers, these ideas of who I thought I needed to be so that I wouldn't feel pain. It was about understanding why I had made this decision to get jumped into a gang and forgiving myself for that decision. It was about saying I was hurt because my cousin was murdered and I yearned for him and him being in my life. It was about saying I needed a father growing up and being able to own that and articulate that. Those things that I was able to do at Homeboy's, they liberated me and they gave me freedom to be who I was always destined to be, which is a person that I really love people. I still enjoy learning new things and I just love being able to help. I love being able to connect people to resources and I love being a part of Homeboy's. I feel like everything in my life makes sense. I wouldn't change anything. I wouldn't go back and try to rearrange anything. I feel like I'm living a life beyond my wildest dream; that everything I had been through has led me to this moment in time.

Winn: Unbelievable. So you completed this program and made a decision that you needed to stay.

Jose: Yeah. I didn't even know I was going to stay, to be honest. I thought I was going to be a construction worker or something. *[laughs]*

Winn: Right.

Jose: Father G just, I guess he just always seen something in me. And others there, too. I can't just say Father G; I owe my journey to so many people. There's just so many people that have shaped me and have believed in me and uplifted me. I started—I did maintenance and I was just so grateful to have an opportunity and I always tell the homies that I work with now, I say, "Man, I used to tell people on our tours, "Be careful because you might run into one of these windows because they're so clean." Because I took so much pride in cleaning these windows. I used to tell our tours, I used to say, "We got the cleanest restrooms in all of Los Angeles," because I used to take so much pride in cleaning the restrooms. I just love being a part of Homeboy. So I went from maintenance, which is like cleaning restrooms to passing out supplies, And I was doing supplies for a while and then they asked me to be a part of security. And then I went from security to employment services.

Winn: Is that when you gained the 60 pounds, switching to security?

Jose: That's when I gained the 60 pounds. No, when I went to the bakery—

Winn: *[laughs]*

Jose: —is when I gained—

Winn: Oh bakery, oh my gosh—

Jose: —the 60 pounds.

Winn: That'll do it. They should do bakery first—

Jose: Yeah.

Winn: —to put on the weight so you look a little—

Jose: *[laughs]* Yeah, and then security.

Winn: —heftier, then security, right?

Jose: Yeah. I went through the bakery for a bit.

Winn: I gained 60 pounds at the bakery last week.

Jose: In one day, huh? *[laughs]*

Winn: Oh my gosh.

Jose: So good, huh?

Winn: Mm-hm. What do you see for yourself in the contribution that you make? Because some of the things that you said—I loved the story when you said you noticed him noticing you. Is that something that you've changed a lot? I know when you and I met and there were several other people that I was with that you met at the same time, you weren't, "Oh hi. Hey, how you doing?" You were real intense on making eye contact and so that there was a connection there.

Jose: I wasn't able to articulate everything, but G had said something a while back. He says, "We receive the tender glance of God and then we be the tender glance of God in the world." I didn't know that's what it was but now I want to be somebody that notices somebody else. I want to be eyes that see and I want to be ears that hear. I can do less talking because I talk a lot already but I want to be arms that receive and I want to be like an extension cord and connect people to people. Being fortunate to be in this role now, where I get to oversee these teams that pretty much oversee the A team in the program, we always say we connect people to people first and then people to resource. Because coming through these experiences, coming up through these experiences and lifestyle, it's hard to allow yourself to connect to resources when you haven't even connected to a person in a healthy way. So I do, I really do want to be that tender glance. I want to see people. I have just amazing, amazing experiences with people by being able to see them. And not what they do but who they are already. That's one of the things about Homeboy's that I learned so much about, is that coming through Homeboy's,

all these big windows and us seeing each other and greeting each other wasn't meant to watch each other, it was meant to see each other and to see that we've always been worthy; all of us have been worthy. We were born worthy. Things happen in life. But for us to see people for who they are is, I think, truly one of the biggest gifts.

Winn: A lot of this stuff that you're talking about is stuff that is applicable, not just for someone who grew up in gangs and served time in prison and therefore has special needs, it's people working in corporations—and that's where I come from. There are people who don't have anything near the type of story that you're sharing but there's still need for recovery, there's still need for being noticed, there's still need for overcoming childhood trauma. And now they're working in corporations that aren't noticing them. I want to bring that message to the for-profit world, that in every organization and every company these exact same stories exist. One of my mentors, Marianne Williamson, used to say that she feels that every business is a front for a church, and what she meant by that has nothing to do with a religion; it's that every place is a place where people can feel safe. Especially the work environment. That's the goal that I have created for my company and I know that we miss the mark a lot but I want to bring the world of nonprofit and the things that you have learned into the corporate world, into the business space. One of my favorite jokes is this guy dies and he's going to heaven and so he's at the gates and he's being judged and he's like, "I'm so sorry, I tried to get into that church, they wouldn't let me in," and God responds and says, "Well, I've been trying to get into that church myself. They won't let me in either."

Jose: *[laughs]* It's special. When you walked out of the room earlier, I looked over and I said, "He's giving really good vibes." You're welcoming, you're receiving. I think that's one of our greatest gifts because that's the gift that really does keep on giving: when we allow ourselves to be reached by people instead of coming with our own ideas of how we think people should move or act. When we allow ourselves to be reached by people it liberates our own self. So I do it selfishly, I think, too, for me to be free from these ideas that I can so easily attach myself to. Even as a director: *Oh, I'm a director. Oh, I'm management team and I oversee this and I oversee that.* What comes with all that? What kind of ideas? But when I allow myself to be reached by my team and to really see them like, *This is a father, this is a mother, this is a sister, this is a brother, and this person has been through some things,* it frees me. It unchains all of us. It liberates us all. It frees me from the ideas I have about you and it frees myself from the ideas I have about myself and how I need to be with you. I do it also—and I didn't realize this until later that it was for me. I wasn't so chained to what I thought I needed to be or who I think I need to show up as, and I can just be and allow others to just be. I love Marianne Williamson so much.

Winn: So you're a dad?

Jose: I'm a dad, yes.

Winn: One child?

Jose: Five childs.

Winn: Five!!

Jose: Five childs; five children, yeah.

Winn: Oh my gosh, five.

Jose: I'm so blessed beyond measure. I look at my children and they will never know what it was like. They will never know what it was like. And that right there, no matter what kind of day I am having, that right there alone, like nothing can touch that. They just—

Winn: Do you have a final message for our listeners?

Jose: I would say that know that you are worthy despite of anything you have been through or anything that anybody has said. Know exactly who you are and are worthy and that you're exactly what God had in mind when God created you. And when you inhabit that truth you invite others to do the same and you're worthy no matter what.

Winn: Dang, you just took me on a roller coaster. *[laughs]*

Jose: Just took me on a roller coaster, too.

Winn: Thank you so much. This was amazing.

Jose: Thank you.

Winn: So grateful.

Jose: You are—you're amazing. You made me feel real comfortable. I was telling Lisa I didn't know what to expect. You're a really great person.

Winn: Thanks, man.