

CHERISHED BELONGING: STUDY GUIDE

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“...though there are many of us, we are one body in Christ, and individually we belong to each other.”


Romans 12:5 (CEB)

CHERISHED BELONGING
The Healing Power of Love in Divided Times

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This study guide is created to support the book, *Cherished Belonging* (978-1668061855), by Gregory Boyle, published by Simon and Schuster, 2024.

All page references are from the hardcover edition of *Cherished Belonging*.



Introduction to the Study Guide

Friends, as we embark on this study of *Cherished Belonging* by Gregory Boyle, I want to reflect on the profound shift in language and mindset that this book invites us to consider. Often our discussions of justice are framed in terms of anti-racism and the combatting of specific evils – such work is a part of our call in baptism. I also believe the real antidote to the divisions we face lies in the concept of what Boyle calls cherished belonging. In a society that is increasingly sick due to fear, distrust, and our isolation from one another, Boyle’s message calls us to a fundamental truth: we belong to each other. This belonging, rather than amplifying what divides us, can be the transformative force needed to heal our communities and, ultimately, our nation.

In my own life and ministry, I’ve seen firsthand the destructive power of the distances we sometimes create between one another. Whether based on race, class, or ideological belief, these differences are often used to deepen the fractures in our society and in our hearts. What we need now is, what I believe to be, a prophetic call to live into a Christian vision of mutuality and connection. *Cherished Belonging* invites us to see one another not as strangers or opponents, but as people to whom we owe our love, respect, and solidarity. In this way, it reframes the way we think about justice—not as a fight against others, but as a journey toward the other as we seek a healing restoration of our shared humanity.

This message could not be more timely. In the midst of a polarized world where harmful rhetoric, exclusionary practices, and systemic injustice seem to be on the rise, the invitation to belong to one another is prophetic, and the living of Boyle’s invitation is an act of radical love of God and neighbor. We are witnessing a moment in history where the forces of division seem to be growing stronger, therefore it is precisely in this moment that we need to hear Boyle’s call to cherish the preciousness of one another, the sacredness of every person, and the truth that we are only whole when we belong to one another. This book offers us not just a vision, but a pathway forward – one that is grounded in the unshakable belief that, as Paul writes in Romans 12:5, “individually we belong to each other.”

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Week 1 Introduction and Chapter 1

Weekly centering verse: “...though there are many of us, we are one body in Christ, and individually we belong to each other.” – Romans 12:5 (CEB)

Summary of Introduction

In the Introduction to *Cherished Belonging* Father Gregory Boyle brings us back into the world of Homeboy Industries (HBI) and lays before us one simple yet difficult question: “Why have we made so little progress?” (9). Father Boyle spends most of the Introduction talking about HBI’s methods and goals, all bent toward building communities where everyone is given a place to be cherished, no matter their actions or illnesses. The Introduction finally lays the groundwork for the rest of the book with a list of what Father Boyle believes, giving seven statements that will appear throughout the following chapters.

Summary of Chapter 1

In “The Wild One” Father Boyle talks about the nature of God’s character, who God is or isn’t, and what that means for us. Father Boyle, referencing Meister Eckhart, says that God is the “Wild One” who is constantly surprising and hospitable, always delighted in us, and never condemning or punishing. He addresses different passages of the Bible that could be used to paint a portrait of God as angry, distant, or scary and claims that these are either misunderstood or to be left behind given what we know of God today. Finally, he concludes the chapter by talking about how an understanding of the God who is the love that is the radiant light inside of everything calibrates us to see as God sees and love as God loves.



Quotes from This Week’s Readings

Introduction

“... the two unwavering principles held at Homeboy Industries were the following: 1) Everyone is unshakably good (no exceptions) and 2) We belong to each other (no exceptions) ‘Now, do I think all our vexing and complex social dilemmas would disappear if we embraced these two notions?’ I paused, then continued, ‘Yes, I do’” (2).

Gregory Boyle, *Cherished Belonging: The Healing Power of Love in Divided Times* (Simon & Schuster)






Chapter 1

“At Homeboy, we try to invite folks to the mystical mind, then we find God, less and less ‘out there’ and more and more ‘in close’ as Meister Eckhart suggests. It is challenging to find this God. I type ‘God’ in a text and it autocorrects ‘GIF.’ But the God who wants to be found is the God of love. We find the ground of oneness there. Which is less about HOW God is and more about WHERE God is: in the loving. We align the compass of our hearts there” (25).

Gregory Boyle, *Cherished Belonging: The Healing Power of Love in Divided Times* (Simon & Schuster)



Discussion Starters

Introduction

● Father Boyle is very clear about his beliefs, claiming, “We don’t make progress when we demonize...We must jettison the idea that there could be such a thing as good people and bad people...we must include every single person in our circle of belonging” (10). Take a moment at the beginning of the study, and be honest with yourself: Do you believe these claims, especially if this is your first time reading Father Boyle’s writings? Come back at the end of the study and see if your answers have changed. If they have, how so?

● Father Boyle and HBI are generally wary of being ‘outcome-driven’ (5). He instead desires to be “less outcome obsessed and more faithful to loving”. How does this ideal strike you? In a world where productivity is seen as success, how could you move away from outcomes and towards faithful loving?

● In the same vein as the previous question, Father Boyle says of HBI “Agency, tools, curriculum– all of this is secondary. It’s what we do. But a community of cherished belonging is who we are” (7). Who is your study group? Your church? How is it different from what you do? Who do you all hope to be by participating in this study?

Chapter 1

● Throughout Chapter 1, Father Boyle discusses Scripture, claiming that some aspects of it must be left behind and that “the ‘mystical filter’ helps us leave behind reading scripture literally and instead start to take scripture seriously” (23). How do you respond to Father Boyle’s comments about Scripture, either positively or negatively? What may it look like to take Father Boyle’s comments seriously, and how could they impact your times of worship or daily life?

● One of the challenges of talking about God is that, as Father Boyle says, everyone has their own “personified Deity” (29). These personifications are “soaked through with all our stuff.” What are some of the ways you, your church, or those around you create a personification of God that may be different from or lesser than who God actually is? Take this chance to evaluate your own personifications, not just to scorn those whose personifications are different from yours.

● Father Boyle uses stories from his time at HBI as a way to get his point across. One such story is of Tonio’s father, which Tonio recounts “when asked to come up with a moment in his life that rhymed with God” (31). What is a moment in your life that rhymes with God? Why do you rhyme this moment with God?

Closing Prayer

Wild God,

We thank you that you infinitely love us. We thank you for constantly reaching out to us even when we sometimes fail to see and accept your initiating love. We confess of the times that we have made you small, when we have made you into our image. Help our hearts expand, so that we may love as wildly and widely as you do.

Amen.



Dive Deeper

Howard Thurman, “Love,” *Jesus and the Disinherited*, 79-99.

For more on how Latinas read the Bible as texts of liberation: Elizabeth Conde-Frazier, “Evangélicas Reading Scriptures: Readings from Within and Beyond the Tradition,” *Latinas Evangélicas: A Theological Survey from the Margins*, 73-89.

For a womanist approach to interpreting the Bible: Wilda C. Gafney, “Introduction,” *Womanist Midrash: A Reintroduction to the Women of the Torah and the Throne*, 1-11.



Week 2 Chapters 2 and 3

Weekly centering verse: “...though there are many of us, we are one body in Christ, and individually we belong to each other.” – Romans 12:5 (CEB)

Summary of Chapter 2

In “The Cruelty Points,” Father Boyle talks about the nature of people – that there are no bad people, just unwell ones. Father Boyle discusses the idea that creating an “Other,” whether it be a dichotomy of good/bad, normal/abnormal, stupid/smart is unhelpful, doing nothing more than condemning those on the opposite side of our created dichotomies. He instead fights for the belief that all people are unshakably good, and those who do things we might consider “bad” or “evil” should instead be viewed as unwell, not whole, or unhealthy. This is the viewpoint that he believes can bring us from judgment to curiosity and from condemnation to healing.

Summary of Chapter 3

In “The Blindfold,” Father Boyle, working off of the idea established in Chapter 2 that all people are unshakably good, writes about how our vision of ourselves and others should change as a result. This new vision sees things like sadness and meanness as “clues to the conditions” instead of the problems themselves. Once we see people without the blindfold, Father Boyle says we can begin to move past labels of evil, bad, and sin to see as God sees, finding joy and pleasure in the people around us just as they are.



Quotes from This Week's Readings

Chapter 2

“The ‘othering’ is the opposite of who God is. It says that there are some folks who don’t belong to us, or they will belong only if they change their behavior... None of us are healed until all of us are healed. And all of us, to some degree, are not fully whole. I’m certainly not. But surely no one who is well hates” (38).

Chapter 3

“The mystic’s eyewear (as opposed to the blindfold) brings into focus the hidden wholeness in everyone. Then our lives become living reminders that we are all made for loving and that the true measure of our love is to love without measure. We don’t get saved from ourselves but to ourselves. The blindfold falls and we see undeniable goodness... We are all made for loving, and once we help each other to see this, we realize how difficult it becomes to harm anyone.” (67).

Gregory Boyle, *Cherished Belonging: The Healing Power of Love in Divided Times* (Simon & Schuster)



Discussion Starters

Chapter 2

● Father Boyle says that anyone who does not believe all people are equal “hold this belief not because they are cruel, but because they are strangers to themselves. That is not a value judgment, but a health assessment” (39). This is a prime example of Father Boyle’s thinking about those who perform actions or live into patterns that many of us might label as “sin,” and other examples of this thinking are seen throughout the chapter and the book. Do you agree or disagree with Father Boyle? Is there no such thing as a “bad” person? If not, how could this impact how you live towards those we so often see as other (politically, economically, etc.)?

● Father Boyle has a broad definition of mental health and mental illness, putting most actions discussed in the chapter on a continuum of “healthy and unhealthy” (58). How are your understandings of mental health similar or different from Father Boyle’s? How do you feel about the ways he talks about mental health? Does it help or hinder your engagement with the ideas he lays out in the chapter?

● Do you agree with Father Boyle’s claim that “Unshakable goodness IS who God knows us to be” (47)? What would it mean for you (and your group, and your church) to see people as unshakably good?

Chapter 3

● Father Boyle claims that the Incarnation “helps us catch sight of what our truth is, and it has next to nothing to do with sin... Goodness made visible” (68). What would you explain the purpose of the Incarnation as, and how does that align or differ from Father Boyle? If the Incarnation is about helping us catch sight of our truth, what truth do you catch sight of?

● In this chapter, Father Boyle talks about salvation in a handful of different places, stating at one point that “the goal is not to save our soul but to spend it. Our authentic discipleship, then, is to grow in love, not goodness” (70). How can you grow in love? In what ways is God calling your group to spend your souls on those around you?

● When discussing seeing ourselves how God sees us, Father Boyle says, “The pleasure of God, utterly reliable, is not connected in any way to a performance well done. Like Jesus, and the guy pulling out the burs, we know that God’s pleasure is in us and who we are” (79). Do you believe God takes pleasure just in who you are? How has that (or could that) knowledge changed how you see yourself and others?

Closing Prayer

God in us,

We know the miracle inherent in our existence. We are here, our beauty stretching out and dwelling within us. But it is hard to believe in one's dignity when the systems and societies to which we belong are content to destroy us. We have heard lies of our worthlessness in the explicit and implicit ways the world interacts with our bodies, stories, and homes. It is incessant—this lie of our own inadequacy, this charade of our inferiority. Remind us that our dignity does not wane or bud in relation to anyone's belief in it, including our own. Let us rest with the knowledge that we have nothing to prove; our dignity, perpetual as it is divine. We will not shrink. We expand. Remind us of our making. For we too contain the divine. Amen.

From Cole Arthur Riley's *Black Liturgies: Prayers, Poems, and Meditations for Staying Human*, (8).



Dive Deeper

For a Latinx perspective on the Incarnation: Edgardo Colón-Emeric, "Jesus Was Born in Guatemala: Towards a Latinx Wesleyan Christology," *The People Called Metodista: Renewing Doctrine, Worship, and Mission from the Margins*, 51-68.



Week 3 Chapters 4 and 5

Weekly centering verse: “...though there are many of us, we are one body in Christ, and individually we belong to each other.” – Romans 12:5 (CEB)

Summary of Chapter 4

In “A Tribe to End All Tribalism,” Father Boyle wants us to remember that we belong to each other, so that there are no more tribes but instead a village that includes all. It is easy to slip into tribalism when we lean into rage or create an other to revile. Homeboy Industries points to how to be a “tribe to end all tribalism,” where the focus is on creating relationships built on love and cherishing one another. By truly believing that we belong to each other, our circle will continue to widen as our idea of who is in our tribe expands.

Summary of Chapter 5

In “Acatamiento,” Father Boyle introduces us to the term acatamiento, affectionate awe. We are encouraged to have this stance and be in relationship in this way with people, and especially with those on the margins, or those one has been taught to hate. By looking with affectionate awe, we learn humility, bowing to the other person, so that we are led to a point of connection that leads us to kindness. Affectionate awe looks past assumptions that people are bad, or that values them just on their actions, to an understanding of the trauma and despair that led them to that point. This then gives us the ability to more fully behold the goodness in others.



Quotes from This Week’s Readings

Chapter 4

“What transcends even understanding each other is believing in each other. If we only join those who have the identical experience we do, it creates a tribe of the like-minded and permits disqualification from the ‘wider we,’ the village of our shared humanity. Together, we can throw the towels over the wall, all hands on deck. All villagers are invited” (97).

Chapter 5

“When we learn to bow and look with attention, we can inaugurate a fresh movement and then choose to abide in it. If we just stay on the side of the street where human beings walk, we have a chance at beholding preciousness. Loving humility gives rise to affection for those who carry so much and yet are still willing to give their last dollar and only shirt” (131).

Gregory Boyle, *Cherished Belonging: The Healing Power of Love in Divided Times* (Simon & Schuster)



Discussion Starters

Chapter 4

● Father Boyle says that “we find our way out of chaos and its dispiriting tribalism by standing against forgetting that we belong to each other” (89). What does it look like to stand against forgetting that we belong to each other? Can you think of ways that you or your community is already working to do so?

● Father Boyle says this about anger and racism: “The problem with our anger is that, by definition, it makes everything about ME. It can’t be. Plus, our anger (again, by definition) has to have a target, a THEM. There is no way around it. Even if our rage is directed toward ‘racism,’ it still involves people, so it is still saddled with a THEM” (101). This book and guide were recommended as an antiracist resource. How do you understand what it means to be antiracist, and does it seem to go against what Father Boyle is talking about here? Does your understanding of being antiracist mean being antipeople?

● “Early Christians upset the setup. They would kiss each other, expanding the notion of ‘our own.’ Planting wet ones, in the most inclusive way, is the ‘endeavor’ of the village” (104). What can upsetting the set up look like for you or your community today? What do you feel might be keeping you from doing so?

Chapter 5

● Instead of reacting to people’s stories with judgmental questions, Father Boyle encourages us to “find a stance more willing to hold the pain of it, even with affectionate awe, that permits suffering to be a teacher for us all,” because “clearly, ‘good’ or ‘bad’ is not how we should frame anything” (111). Do you find yourself or your community labelling people or actions as good or bad?

● What do you imagine might change in your community if people were able to hold this posture with everyone they came in contact with?

● In this chapter, Father Boyle talks about looking with attention - prosoche. He explains that “it beckons us to an awareness of where we are and who we are with and what is present right in front of us. It jostles us a bit from the narratives we cling to. For if we cling to them, we can’t make progress and we won’t recognize progress when it’s made” (112). Can you think of a time where you experienced this kind of awareness that jostled you from narratives or assumptions that you cling to?

● Talk with your group about ways you can practice this kind of awareness. Plan to share with the group next week on the experience, and reflect on implicit biases that this practice may have revealed.

● Father Boyle shares the story of Ricardo bowing to the congregation instead of the altar at his wedding: Ricardo “gave himself up on purpose, with a reverence for the complexity of all that the people in the crowd have to carry. His very esteem and regard placed the folks seated at center stage and indeed created a holding place of belonging” (117). Father Boyle also shares his practice of slightly bowing his head when in conversation with others “as a reminder to forget [himself] on purpose” (116). What are other ways that you or your community can practice this kind of decentering of the self in order to better hold space for the other?

Closing Prayer

God of acatamiento,

We thank you for the ways that you hold us all so affectionately, choosing to humble yourself so that we may know you better. We confess that we have struggled to hold our neighbors with affectionate awe, and have created tribes of our own that exclude others. Help us to create a community where all are welcomed, nurtured and known, and to recognize the practices and attitudes that prevent this. May we see one another with the attention and love that you show us.

Amen.



Dive Deeper

For more on race and Christianity: Willie James Jennings, *The Christian Imagination: Theology and Origins of Race*.



Week 4 Chapters 6 and 7

Weekly centering verse: “...though there are many of us, we are one body in Christ, and individually we belong to each other.” – Romans 12:5 (CEB)

Summary of Chapter 6

In “Visible Entirely,” Father Boyle begins by describing how he chooses to intentionally greet people with kindness as a way to brighten people by truly seeing them. In a time where so many people experience loneliness and have felt hurt or ignored by others, creating spaces where people are met with kindness and truly seen can lead to transformation. Father Boyle describes how Homeboy Industries is a place where people experience comfort and joy because of the ways that they are seen and known. As people feel that they have truly been seen, they can start on the path to healing in community. In this way, we can begin the work of creating communities of love and kindness, where change in systems can begin.

Summary of Chapter 7

In “Make Windows,” Father Boyle describes the lens of love as one that erases all distance between ourselves and others. Love defines who we are as human beings—individually and as a country. “Staying lovestruck” means that we live in such a way that we have no enemies, and the orientation to abide in love allows us to see God in every place, thing, and person (157). For Father Boyle, putting on the lens of love does not mean bypassing the pain and suffering in the world; rather, he calls us to be grounded in the reality of God’s expansive and all-encompassing love—a love revealed and made manifest through our relationships with all of God’s creations.



Quotes from This Week’s Reading

Chapter 6

“Everyone finds themselves, in such an act of surrounding, awakened to what is already there. It is what we mean when we say ‘the self, hidden with Christ in God.’ Beyond the ego and our own brokenness, we find this holiness in our being whole together. Healthier happening in comfort and flourishing joy. Increase the dose” (154).

Chapter 7

“The truth of love is that it is the only way the distance between us as people gets burned away. Soon we find ourselves on this journey to union with love itself. A love that permeates you regardless of how things turn. Then distance vanishes, just as homies want to see and be seen, as one homie put it, ‘with belonging eyes’” (168).

Gregory Boyle, *Cherished Belonging: The Healing Power of Love in Divided Times* (Simon & Schuster)



Discussion Starters

Chapter 6

● This chapter offers us a new way of thinking about prayer: “Prayer is greeting...it is a training ground for the curiosity we’ll need when we choose to pay attention to each other. We dive right into the very generous hospitality of God, in the present moment, by consciously greeting folks. It is how we pray without ceasing. The constant attention of prayer is an invitation to practice heaven always, attentive to the person who’s right in front of us” (145). Praying without ceasing is often mentioned as a spiritual practice, but here Father Boyle suggests that the way we greet others can be part of our prayer. How does this fit into your own understanding of what prayer is?

● Attempt this practice over the next week, and come to your next session ready to share something about the experience.

● Father Boyle writes that “we seek to help folks become, more and more, their truth in love by loving them, by choosing to brighten, and this builds loving societies. Systems change when people do. People change when they are cherished” (149-150). This may feel like an oversimplification, or overly optimistic, especially in the context of how racism is so ingrained in so many of our systems in America. Discuss this with your group - are you quick to dismiss it, does it feel hopeful, or make the task feel more manageable? Can you think of times where you saw this happen in some way?

● Father Boyle says that “cherishing people is easy. Remembering to cherish is really difficult” (150). As you and your group work to put into action the reflections that Father Boyle offers in this book, in what ways can you help yourself and others remember to cherish people?

Chapter 7

● On page 156, Father Boyle relays the story of a homegirl named Pooka. When Pooka describes the way of life at Homeboy Industries, she says, “Love is our lens. It is how we see things.” How is love like a lens? What comes into view when we put on love as a lens? How have you seen this at work in your life, your church, or broader community?

● Father Boyle is frank about the reality that the Church has “[lost] track of the centrality of love” (157). He says that this is “a failure that [has] indeed seduced the Church to embrace empire and control as its centerpiece. We forgot to do love’s work” (157). Do you agree with Father Boyle’s assessment? What is “love’s work”? What are tangible ways your church community can pick this work?

● On page 164, Father Boyle quotes Stevie: “When you’re grounded, then you can be an anchor for others.” He comments, “Finding the truth of the awakened heart, resting in God resting in me, anchored for you. No one is grounded once and for all. Every day, we need to be freshly grounded” (164). How have you experienced being anchored by another? What did that feel like? What grounds you? How have your grounding practices enabled you to be an anchor for others?

Closing Prayer

God who sees,

Thank you for looking upon us with your tender love. Your love grounds us when we feel shaken by the world or those in the world who do not recognize our inherent goodness. Help us put on the lens of love—for ourselves, our family, our church family, and those in our community who are systematically ignored. Help us be your Church, the body of Christ that embraces all people and holds all people in tenderness until they can feel their true worth. Amen.



Dive Deeper

For more on healing in community: Gloria E. Anzaldúa, “Let us Be the Healing of the Wound: The Coyolxauhqui Imperative—La sombra y el sueño,” *Light in the Dark: Rewriting Identity, Spirituality, Reality*.

Cole Arthur Riley, “Love,” *Black Liturgies: Prayers, Poems, and Meditations for Staying Human*, 171-180.



Week 5
Chapters 8 and 9

Weekly centering verse: “...though there are many of us, we are one body in Christ, and individually we belong to each other.” – Romans 12:5 (CEB)

Summary of Chapter 8

In “The Household of God,” Father Boyle paints a picture of the Church that abides in the “everything fits” inclusive and expansive love of God (191). Father Boyle begins the chapter by calling readers to see social justice movements as “Gospel living” (172). Movements such as LGBTQIA+ inclusion and racial and ethnic reconciliation pose no threat to the Church; rather, they fulfill the Church’s commission to be where Christ is—attendant to the marginalized. The household of God is full of disciples who are growing in love in such a way that the (physical/relational) space they create is one of radical belonging.

Summary of Chapter 9

In “The Fastest Route,” Father Boyle acknowledges that becoming a community of cherished belonging is slow process. Relationships that help people—particularly marginalized people—come alive within themselves and to each other takes time. To Father Boyle, the fastest route to becoming a community of cherished belonging is intentionality. Father Boyle encourages readers to be a people who decide to see all people as “one of us,” to receive and hold one another in tenderness, and to be a community that comes around the lonely and forgotten.



Quotes from This Week’s Reading

Chapter 8

“Disciples rest here in God’s love and live out that anchored place. The flourishing temperament we embrace wants to abide in the marrow of the Gospel. No time for things that God could give two toots about. We all want to be invited to the highest purpose held up to us. We will unify if it’s held up. Offended by nothing. Everyone welcome. Drenched in divinity” (192).

Chapter 9

“Real kinship takes time. ‘Querer es poder,’ the señoras at Dolores Mission Church would often say. ‘If you want to, you can do it.’ Intentionality is our superpowers. It’s the surest route, anyway. Part of our intentionality is to surrender and to cease fighting and stop resisting. Our surrender allows us to ‘open our hands’ in order to ‘be held.’ What the world is trying to be is a wraparound place, where ‘belongance’ is afforded to all” (210).

Gregory Boyle, *Cherished Belonging: The Healing Power of Love in Divided Times* (Simon & Schuster)



Discussion Starters

Chapter 8

● On page 177, Father Boyle says that those who embody the household of God “greet the world with warmheartedness, and people believe they are good.” He continues, “The ‘household of God’ reminds people of this fact rather than underscoring disappointment. The positivity of our warm hearts moves us forward and advances us toward a community of cherished belonging” (177). To Father Boyle, what does it mean to be “warmhearted”? Do you know someone who is warmhearted? What are they like? Have you ever been a part of a church or other community that embodied this warmheartedness? What was that like?

● For Father Boyle, the marks of our authenticity as disciples of Jesus are “joy and fearlessness” (187). He says, “We choose, then, to become a Church where your heart skips a beat with joy instead of missing a beat with fear” (187). What does joy look like in your faith community?

● At the beginning of this chapter, Father Boyle describes how certain Christians feel they must defend the Church’s honor against what they see as offensive. Father Boyle says that this kind of preoccupation misses the point of being the Church entirely. What is at risk if the Church remains afraid and easily offended? Later, Father Boyle asks readers directly: “What would we do as the Church if we weren’t afraid or offended by anything?” (187). How would you answer this question? You could think about the Church catholic, your denomination, your conference, and/or your local church community. As a group, discuss how your church can, in one or two ways, grow in its joyful and fearless embodiment of the Gospel.

Chapter 9

● Father Boyle stresses that anyone can take up the work of cherishing. When speaking about working with gangster members, he says, “It’s not about message and certainly not about advice, but, rather, loving, caring folks who pay attention and choose to be the very notice and heartbeat of God” (197). What do you think of Father Boyle’s assertion in this passage? What is the role of listening with loving attention in antiracist work? Discuss how you might position yourself to better listen to marginalized people—both as an individual and as a church.

● Father Boyle notes the connection between healing and being a community of cherished belonging. He asks himself this question: “If we allow people to live in tents on Main Street, are we honoring their civil rights, or are we ignoring that they belong to us?” (199). Based on what you know about Father Boyle, how do you think he would answer this question? How would you answer this question?

● Father Boyle names that Homeboy Industries is more than an organization that offers wraparound services; Homeboy intends to create a “wraparound place,” where the wounded can receive the cherishing embrace of a tender community. What do you think is the difference between providing wraparound services and being a wraparound place?

● Many of our churches do beautiful work with food pantries, clothing drives, and service trips. What would our mission work look like if we, as a church, embraced accompaniment of the marginalized as our missional model?



Dive Deeper

For more on kinship and solidarity: Ada María Isasi-Díaz, “Solidarity: Love of Neighbor in the Twenty-First Century,” *Mujerista Theology: A Theology for the Twenty-First Century*, 86-104.

For more on being the Church and a preferential option for the poor: Robert Chao Romero, “Social Justice Theologies of Latin America: Liberation Theology and Misión Integral,” *Brown Church: Five Centuries of Latino/a Social Justice, Theology, and Identity*, 142-162. A Spanish translation is also available, titled *Iglesia mestiza*.

For more on accompaniment of the marginalized: Edgardo Colón-Emeric, “Practical Divinity as Christian Theology from the Margins,” *The People Called Metodista: Renewing Doctrine, Worship, and Mission from the Margins*, 31-50.

For more on a social justice oriented Methodism: Joerg Reiger, *No Religion but Social Religion: Liberating Wesleyan Theology*.

Cole Arthur Riley, “Justice,” *Black Liturgies: Prayers, Poems, and Meditations for Staying Human*, 135-144.



Closing

Over the course of the past five weeks, you have journeyed with each other and with Father Boyle to explore how to create a community of cherished belonging. Father Boyle has continually pointed us to expand our circle wider, so that the margins no longer exist, and those who have been marginalized can find a place of tender sanctuary.

Countless people in our local communities suffer under multiple forms of marginalization. Reflect on your experience during this book study: has the Spirit brought to your heart and mind a particular group in your local community? Discuss this with your group. Why do you feel drawn to this particular population of people? How do you think your faith community could participate in creating a community of cherished belonging with them?

As Father Boyle named, building a community of cherished belonging is a slow process that necessitates intentionality. As you leave this study, enter into a time of discernment with your group. Is there a particular group your church community would like to explore how to accompany? This could be those who have been justice-involved, those who are unsheltered, those who are food-insecure, immigrants, etc. As a part of your discernment process, explore local organizations who are already working with your chosen population. Consider bringing in a representative from such organizations to learn more about potential collaborations.

Sending Prayer

Reconciling God,
We give you thanks that you are a God of expansive love. You are the love that erases all margins, the love that heals all wounds, the love that sends us out to be love in a hurting world. We confess that we have not always lived into the reality of your love, and we confess that we have failed to live up to the responsibility to be your love in this world. Accompanying God, gives us your eyes to see the people who have been made invisible, those who are hated and harmed, and remind us that they are our neighbors. They are part of your family; they are a part of us, and our wholeness and well-being depends upon their wholeness and well-being. May your love make us fearless, so that we may be people of over-flowing joy. Send us out, by the power of your Holy Spirit, to be your healing in this world.
Amen.

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