



# **Barking to the Choir: The Power of Radical Kinship**

*Gregory Boyle*

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In a moving example of unconditional love in difficult times, the Jesuit priest and bestselling author of *Tattoos on the Heart*, Gregory Boyle, shares what three decades of working with gang members in Los Angeles has taught him about faith, compassion, and the enduring power of kinship.

In his first book, *Tattoos on the Heart: The Power of Boundless Compassion*, Gregory Boyle introduced us to Homeboy Industries, the largest gang-intervention program in the world. Critics hailed that book as an “astounding literary and spiritual feat” (*Publishers Weekly*) that is “destined to become a classic of both urban reportage and contemporary spirituality” (*Los Angeles Times*). Now, after the successful expansion of Homeboy Industries, Boyle returns with *Barking to the Choir* to reveal how compassion is transforming the lives of gang members.

In a nation deeply divided and plagued by poverty and violence, *Barking to the Choir* offers a snapshot into the challenges and joys of life on the margins. Sergio, arrested at nine, in a gang by twelve, and serving time shortly thereafter, now works with the substance-abuse team at Homeboy to help others find sobriety. Jamal, abandoned by his family when he tried to attend school at age seven, gradually finds forgiveness for his schizophrenic mother. New father Cuco, who never knew his own dad, thinks of a daily adventure on which to take his four-year-old son. These former gang members uplift the soul and reveal how bright life can be when filled with unconditional love and kindness.

This book is guaranteed to shake up our ideas about God and about people with a glimpse at a world defined by more compassion and fewer barriers. Gently and humorously, *Barking to the Choir* invites us to find kinship with one another and convinces us all of our own goodness.

## **Barking to the Choir: The Power of Radical Kinship Details**

Date : Published November 14th 2017 by Simon Schuster

ISBN : 9781476726151

Author : Gregory Boyle

Format : Hardcover 224 pages

Genre : Nonfiction, Spirituality, Autobiography, Memoir, Religion, Faith, Theology, Audiobook, Social Movements, Social Justice, Biography Memoir, Christian

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# **From Reader Review Barking to the Choir: The Power of Radical Kinship for online ebook**

## **Russ Mckell says**

he's done it again. a simple, beautiful, poignant book that reminds me the kind of person, the kind of christian, i want to be. reminding us that heaven isn't just around the corner, it is the corner.

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## **Mark Lenz says**

Hilarious and insightful, Father Greg Boyle shares his stories working with gang members in LA, and calls us to recognize the humanity and seek kinship with all people- especially those society tells us not to care about.

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## **Barb says**

More great stories from Fr. Greg about life at Homeboy Industries and the Dolores Mission parish. The lens of kinship brings the stories into clearer focus so we might put ourselves in greater proximity to the people living on the margins of society. His humor, his wisdom, his perspective all work towards challenging us to be fearless in our love of neighbor - every neighbor. There is no us vs. them - only us.

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## **Brittany Wilmes says**

This book is so human and joyful and celebratory at a time when we need to remember how to be returned to ourselves (and to each other) more than ever. Read it. Live it.

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## **Mehrsa says**

Oh boy. I finished this book and immediately started reading it again. It's so beautiful and powerful. There are some moments where it gets a bit uncomfortable (sometimes, it reads kind of like "gang bangers say the darndest things"), but all in all, Boyle is the kind of human that teaches us all how to human. Even if you are not a Christian, this book will make you weep. Though it is heavily christian focused. Read it. Tell your friends to read it. And start to practice radical kinship.

The other thing I kept thinking is that it reads a lot like Just Mercy by Bryan Stevenson to me. Stevenson is another human who knows what love and mercy is all about. I also read that book multiple times. It's nice to have these reminders.

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## Kaytee Cobb says

Well, as you may have guessed, I couldn't get enough of Father Boyle, and was only too happy to see that his second book is available on Scribd, which I got a free 3-month trial recently! This follow-on to *Tattoos on the Heart* is just as fantastic and amazing as Father Boyle's first book. He is charismatic and entertaining, and full of fun and sass, as all good priests should be, I feel. So many of these stories will stick with you long after you finish turning the pages of his books, (or listening to the audio, as the case may be). Decades of service to the gang members of LA have led to a treasure trove of real life change. And, if you're a word nerd like me (mom, this aside is for you), you really won't be able to get enough of the literary and verbal conundrums highlighted in these pages. I found myself smiling and even laughing out loud often.

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## Lisa says

It is impossible to read this book and not tear up multiple times. It is also impossible to read this and not want to be a kinder, more compassionate person. The premise of this book is that we belong to each other. Fr. Gregory advocates for simple, small kind acts and words to change the world- not moral outrage, judgement or condescension. Despite the heavy, sad stories of the homies of LA, the book is full of laughter and joy. This man is changing lives, and it won't be surprising if one day, he is canonized a saint.

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## Trish says

This book radiates such loving-kindness, one wishes everyone could share in the bounty. I had not heard of Boyle's 2009 No. 1 bestseller, called *Tattoos on the Heart: The Power of Boundless Compassion*, before I heard Krista Tippett interview Father Boyle for her podcast *On Being*. This second book is a series of true stories about the gang members, former convicts, drug dealers and addicts Father Boyle knows from his ministry, Homeboy Industries, in Los Angeles. Each anecdote carries with it a reminder of what burdens people carry, a prod to do better in our lives, and something small (or big) to meditate on.

A highlight of this book are Boyle's pointing to and holding up some of the homies' mangling of common phrases—phrases so ordinary to many of us that we rush by them, never stopping to think them through carefully. By misunderstanding phrases only heard and never read, the homies sometimes hit upon a better, deeper meaning that speaks to their experiences, e.g., "I'm at a pitchfork in my life."

Father Boyle is following the teaching of the Dalai Lama, Pope Francis, Dorothy Day, Mother Theresa, and every other effective practitioner of faith and loving-kindness on earth by going with the exhortation to "Stay Close to the Poor." He discusses this in his usual discursive style near the end of this book, asking

"Is God inclusive or exclusive?...In the end, though, the measure of our compassion with what Martin Luther King calls 'the last, the least, and the lost' lies less in our service to those on the margins, and more in our willingness to see ourselves in kinship with them."

Radical kinship. If you've ever experienced a blast of radical kinship—an openhearted, limitless generosity—you will know it is transformative. And *that* is where Father Boyle is going.

There are no bad people, only bad actions. We're all in a stage of becoming. We all are equally able to find

grace and create the kind of environment we seek, if given a place to rest and to experience love without expectation of return.

“We are charged not with obliterating our diversity and difference but instead with heightening our connection to each other.”

This is his answer to reconciling diversity and connectedness. It is often thought that the more diverse we are, the less we have in common, the less we can come together over shared goals. This book tells a different story.

Father Boyle's book about gang members in L.A. finding a place of peace to gather their thoughts together is the antidote to a political world in which power and money are operative goals. We'd all like a little more power, to live as we like without anybody else's say so, but sometimes the lack of power is the key to humility, and thus to a wide and deep world of loving-kindness. But as Boyle tells Terry Gross in a *Fresh Air* interview: “Prayer is not going to fix our healthcare system. Stop it. Don't think that. You actually have to *do* something about guns, you can't just pray.”

This is powerful stuff, folks, and will be my gift to family and friends at this year-end. When you get your own copy, look carefully at the author photo on the inside back jacket. Have you *ever* seen a group of people more radiant in your lives?

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### **Rebecca Cook says**

Spending more time in the company of Father Greg Boyle and the homies of Homeboy Industries is just what the doctor ordered. With his message of transformative redemption through love and kinship at the margins, Father Boyle offers his readers the hope of radical new beginnings and the erasure of all the things that divide us from one another. The writing is honest, heartfelt and never preachy. Barking at the Choir is an experience -- I laughed, I cried and I prayed throughout. Bless you and all the lives you touch, G. Sign me up to sing in the Choir!

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### **Tiffany Reisz says**

I'm bereft of words and anyone who knows me knows that's saying something.

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### **Zeynep says**

### **Great read!**

Loved this book from page one to the last page. Homeboy Industries has become a beacon of hope for so many who had none and that hope is what shines to light the rest of the world. Highly recommend this book to anyone who wants to understand that no man is an island, we are all one in our humanity.

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## **steph says**

*"....stand in awe of what folks have to carry rather than in judgement at how they carry it."*

The message I received from reading this book - of compassion, love, awe, friendship -left me so inspired that I immediately put the audiobook on hold at the library to listen on my commute. I needed to have the words inside here seared onto my brain one more time. Boyle spends most of this book listening anecdotal accounts of various gang members he's worked with over 30+ years in Los Angeles and the message he gives is clear - there is no you and them. Only just us. Once you stop judging and start standing in awe of what each individual has overcome, risen from, only then can you love like God intended you to love. Only then can you find kinship with all. For it is never you and them. Instead we are all the same with our scars, worries, fears and love.

And damn if that's not one of the best message's I've heard all year.

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## **Bev Siddons says**

OMG! With the turmoil in our world, our political environment, our treatment--indeed, often dismissal--of those "in the margins", this book is a must-read.

Barking to the Choir: The Power of Radical Kinship is a book of profound, if not simple, wisdom. I am moved by its message of inclusion and kinship. Be non-judgmental and connect with people, all people. We are all the same. We are simply living through different experiences.

"There are no monsters, villains, or bad guys . . . there are only folks who carry unspeakable pain." (p. 136)  
We have the same needs/desires of belonging to one another, to feel valued, seen, noticed.

This learned man quotes many of the world's spiritual leaders who promote loving kindness, but I weep with his stories of the "homies" whose lives have touched and influenced Boyle's place on this earth.

Some take-aways:

- "Who you are is enough." (p 84)
- "Now. Here. This. Listen here and now and only to this person." (p 84)
- "There is nothing more essential, vital, and important than love and its carrier--tenderness--practiced in the present moment. By keeping it close, just right now, we are reminded to choose connection over alienation, kinship over self-absorption." (p 85)
- "There is an African concept called \*ubuntu\* that describes a world without division. It makes nonsense of all that would separate us--color, religion, politics. It seeks only to heal and forgive." (p 191) . . . "I know we're not friends, but let's not be enemies."
- "Moral outrage doesn't lead us to solutions--it keeps us from them." (p 141)

I plan to buy several copies of this book to share with friends, family, perhaps even strangers. A copy may be

left on a table or chair at a restaurant or a bench at the laundromat. Greg Boyle has written a book with a message that couldn't be more timely. Love one another by your actions not your words.

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### **Lauren Murray says**

While it's hard to hold a candle to "Tattoos on the Heart," this is the same Fr. Greg Boyle all of his fans have grown to know and love. ??A little more sporadic than his previous work, he still delivers heavy-hitters in every chapter. I didn't connect as much to his messages, and they were fuddled (not as clear as "Tattoos"), but he ultimately delivers a profound message: no justice, no peace, can be achieved without kinship. ??I enjoyed it cover to cover, but be prepared to take some time to get used to G's style of writing.

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### **Abigail says**

I read this book in a day; I already knew I was going to like it. You should definitely read Boyle's first book, Tattoos on the Heart, and then read this. I think everyone could find this book to be encouraging, wise, and challenging. Personally, this is a book to read when god, religious people, Christianity, and ontological questions are distressing. It makes me want to be more loving and less fearful.

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