

My Friend Luis

Episode 11 — “A New Kind of Bricks”

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LUIS: Nobody really preached to me the gospel on December 19th, but the way I came to have a relationship with Jesus and the Trinity itself was because He showed Himself to me. It wasn't an eloquent preaching. He just came and embraced me. And that day I knew how I didn't have to earn His love. He always loved me. How in the world did I lose that?

WAYNE: Hi, I'm Wayne Jacobsen, and this is My Friend Luis — the story of one of the most engaging men I've ever met, and of the friendship that developed between us. It has transformed both of our lives and left us in grateful awe at the adventure of life on this little planet.

By this time, I've known Luis for about a decade. I watched him endure the struggles of living in the shadows of American society as we enjoyed being with his family for dinner and conversation. We always enjoyed being with them, but we also watched them labor under the oppressive nature of their religious approach to God. They were always busy and always tired. I wanted to share with them some of what Sara and I had learned after we had been forced out of the congregation we loved so much. A lot of that, of course, is in *The Shack*, and a book I wrote eight years before that called *He Loves Me*. The first is a fictional story of Mack finding his way out of a great sadness into God's love, and the other is a non-fictional account of my own story of transition from working hard to keep on God's good side to learning the freedom of living each day as His beloved child.

In the 24 years we've been exploring this part of our journey, we discovered it had freed us in so many ways. We no longer lived under obligation, but endearment to God. We discovered more relational ways of people sharing that journey together than just sitting in religious services. Our relationship with Him grew, as did our fellowship with others, as it was more honest and less manipulative. We also recognized the incredible changes that came in the way we lived by relaxing in Father's love. We desperately wanted Luis and Maria to discover that freedom as well, but also knew it risked disaffecting them from the community that was an important part of their lives. Religious leaders often struggle with those finding freedom from the obligations they want to put on them. Though I'd given Luis both of the books that I mentioned, he seemed to have missed the deeper message behind them. He thought he was already living in that reality, and I didn't want to be an intrusion on his journey, but a resource when he was ready. Until then, I let our friendship grow.

I traveled a lot, and he was always interested in the places I'd gone, especially the international destinations. He asked me numerous times what it must be like to travel and come back into the U.S. so easily, and hoped he could do so one day. In the summer of 2018, Luis and Maria invited us to their youngest daughter's quinceañera, a rite of passage for girls on their 15th birthday. As much as I enjoyed the pageantry of that night, I was troubled by the obligations laid on his daughter. It's the usual warning

teenagers are given by adults in hopes of keeping them out of trouble. It weighed heavily on commitment and human performance to be a good Christian, and I knew it wouldn't work. It never does. We're not blessed by God because of how good we can be, but because He loves us. And we're not changed by our own efforts, but as the fruit of learning to live in His love, even at our most broken.

After that night, I knew we would have our moment. For his daughter's sake, at least, he needed to be exposed to a more relational way of living out the meaning of the gospel instead of trying to work harder and do more for God. I looked for an opportunity, but it hadn't come yet. He hadn't asked, and I didn't yet have insight as to the best way to engage that conversation. Then one day, as he was leaving my home, he asked if we could get together sometime soon. He had something he wanted to share with me. The next Thursday afternoon, we met at the In-N-Out Burger to share a drink and a conversation. And that's when the door swung wide open — and it all began with a dream he'd had just a few nights before.

LUIS: On this dream, I saw Jesus in the dream giving you a set of lenses. They were glasses. He showed you — you looked at them, you put them on, and then you gave them back to Jesus, and I understood. Nobody told me that on the dream. It was communicated to me that that was the way Jesus sees. He was telling you: "Tell my people, my children, how I see them, how I view them, and how they have to view me."

And then on the next scene, I saw you making bricks. You were making bricks. When I saw you doing that, I said, well, I got to help him — he's my friend. That's why I approached you in the dream. And then you said, "Well, if we're going to do this together," you said, "I got to teach you." So you started showing me how to mix everything there — mix everything on the clay. It was manure, by the way — horse manure — and then you break it down, and then you mix it. And then after the bricks were done, I thought we were done, and it ended right there. I said, so that's it? It's just you teaching me how to make bricks. And then you said, "No — you see those over there?" And I said yeah — there were some homes that had holes in them. He says, "We're going to go and we're going to patch those. And people who doesn't have a home, we're going to teach them how to do it from the ground up."

What I got in the dream: that when we were patching those houses, it was people like me — that I had already, I got a foundation already, of what Jesus was, but it was flawed. There were holes in it. It wasn't corrected. And then the ones that didn't have the homes, you were teaching them a relationship, not a religion — a relationship with Jesus.

After we finished all of the bricks, then I remember asking you, and I said, "Well, there's no more bricks." In my mind, in that dream, I was like, there's nothing else to do. Then you pointed out with your hand and says, "Oh, yes, there's much more to do." You pointed in front of us, and I saw many, many, many homes to be built and many, many homes to fix — many of them. Then I asked you, "What should we do now?" And then you pointed back to the clay and the manure and said, "We're going back to make more bricks." And the dream ended right there.

WAYNE: I remember you told me this dream. And then you looked at me when you told me, you said, "Will you teach me to make bricks?" And I said, "Well, what are the bricks?" And you said, "I don't know

— tell me." And I'm going, "No, no, you tell me. I don't know."

LUIS: Right, yeah. What are the bricks? And you didn't know.

WAYNE: Then you asked about — if I remember right, you asked about your daughter's quinceañera. And so you asked me, "What did you think about my daughter's thing?" Because it's the first quinceañera we've ever been to, and we were honored to be invited, and we got to spend part of the afternoon with your family. And I remember you asking me, "So what do you think?" And I'm going, "Oh, I thought it was beautiful — loved you, your family, loved all that." I said, "But man, what the pastor said to your daughter — it made me cry." And you said, "What made you cry?" — because you thought it was, like, because I was being really touched.

LUIS: Touched, yes.

WAYNE: And I said, "You know, I watched an older man put a 15-year-old woman under the law, and it breaks my heart." And I remember you just — you kind of looked like, I don't even know where to put that.

LUIS: I just, you know, kind of like mentally, you're kind of like, what is he saying? As we kept talking, you and I, more and more — it was in a legalistic way, or on a religious way. In fact, I was really shocked when I learned that you didn't go to church. You should have seen Jenny and Andrea when they found out you didn't go to church — they were like, "What?" Andrea was like, "You can do that?" And I was like, oh boy. I said yeah, and then I started explaining to them. And my wife, she was opposed at first, because she kept saying, "Look, look, look, that's not how we're raised. This is what pastor says," and everything. And then I said, "Well, let's just ask Jesus, you know, what He intended."

WAYNE: I came to find out, as we were recording this podcast, that Luis had been looking over my shoulder for a long time, wondering why Sara and I lived out our faith differently than he did. A few years before he had his dream about making this new kind of bricks, he had a conversation about us with a worker who occasionally helped Sara with the infrastructure of her garden.

LUIS: One time we're having lunch together out there in the yard, and he says, "Hey, have you noticed, you know, Wayne and Sara?" I said, "Have I noticed what?" "Have you noticed that about them?" I said, "What about them? What?" He says, "Well, the way they are." I said, "Okay — on what aspect?" He says, "I think that they're Catholic." I said, "They're Catholic?" I said, "Why? Why you say that?" "Well," he said, "because they're very good people." And I said, "Okay. So only Catholics are good people?" So he says, "No, no, no — well, I don't know." I said, "What do you mean you don't know?" He says, "They don't look religious, but they're really good. I mean, they take care of me. They show love. They show patience. Even when I messed up or I break something, Sara doesn't get upset. She just said, 'Oh, those things happen.' And she doesn't get angry. I have more customers" — he called them bosses. He said, "I have more bosses, and they don't treat me like that. They either deducted from my pay or they scream at me — but not Sara. They're different."

I said, well — the best answer I had for him — it's like, "The best I can tell you is that they don't talk the talk. They walk the walk." And he says, "Huh. In other words, they don't tell you that they're good people — they are good people. And they don't just tell you that they love you — they just do." I said, "I don't know what to tell you. But just to answer your question — no, they're not Catholic. No." He was like, "Oh, okay. I thought they were." He says, "It's hard to tell them — tell them, 'What are you, Catholic? Christian? What are you, Mormon?'" I said, "They're none of the above. I guess they're — they're just — they have the love of God, and they just want to share it with you and me." He was like, "Okay."

I wouldn't be doing the things I'm doing if I wouldn't met you — or seen — I'm sorry — or seen the world the way — having the worldview that I have now, if I never met you. Even though I had an encounter directly with God — it really impacted my life in a way that it's — it was loving and unconditional — and then I fall back into religious patterns. I guess if I wouldn't met you, I would have been — continued to think that I have to go to church three times a week or more, because the more I go to church, the more I please God. And the more I please Him, the more He'll love me. And the more He loved me, the more I feel His love, and the more He appeared to me, and the more He'll work on my life. Or I have to keep pushing my daughters into pray and pray and pray all the time. I'm not saying that there's something wrong with praying — no, no, no, no, no — or with going to church. No, no. What I'm saying is that I have to do things because I have to please Him, I have to appease Him, and I have to be a good son so my Father can love me. When in reality, I don't have to compete or do anything for Him to love me any more than He already does.

WAYNE: We started talking about what it is to live loved, rather than what it is to live religiously. What it is to let the love of God transform us from the inside, rather than conform ourselves to expectations on the outside — which to me is law. Whether it's the Mosaic law or Christian principles, it's still law in the end. You're still chasing a bunch of expectations, trying to get God to like you when God already loves you. And so we started having that conversation. I remember you just talking about, "Oh my gosh, this is so good." And you were feeling lighter and lighter.

LUIS: Then you looked at me and you go, "This is the bricks." And I remember my whole body just trembled when you said that — "this is the bricks" — because that was the bricks.

WAYNE: Since I've known you as my friend for 12 years, man, I'd wanted to help you guys see a bigger Jesus than the ones you guys knew. And that doesn't mean you have to stop going to church — I know lots of people go to church — but there's such a better way to walk with Jesus. We got talking about that. I remember how into the conversation you were — like, "I want to learn this. I want to learn to make these bricks." And that began a really different stage of our relationship. We spent — that was, what, a couple of years ago? Maybe a little longer.

LUIS: Yeah, about two years.

WAYNE: And I say, "Why don't you guys start coming over every other Tuesday night?" So we started — your family come over, you come over, and we just start talking about how it is that we live loved by God.

That's what religion does. It robs us of a real relationship with a loving father and substitutes rituals, rules, and expectations, which are onerous and too often boring. I'm not saying that going to a congregation of itself does that. There are congregations who allow the freedom for relationship to grow, but most eventually slide into the performance trap that saps the power and joy of the gospel. It is always easier to tell people what to do than to walk them into a transformative relationship with Father's love. We spent the next two years exploring what it means to make a new kind of brick, and what a relational life in Christ looks like. He had many questions, and we fell into an easy rhythm that allowed us to celebrate the fingerprints of God in the spontaneity of our lives. We saw how we had misinterpreted the scriptures for so long as rules to follow, rather than a beacon pointing us to Jesus and how He wants to live with us. I was surprised how easily Luis took to it all, like the proverbial duck to water. At times it seemed almost too easy.

A few months in, he came over one day excited to tell me a story, and for the first time shared with me the night he crossed the border and the personal encounter with the love of God. Now it all made sense. And I was shocked that he had never told me that story before. I honestly think it had gotten buried beneath his religious performance. Since that joy was no longer part of his journey, it was easier to think of it as an isolated incident when it truly was the defining moment of his life.

You came over one morning to clean my house, and you said, "I've got to tell you a story, man. It just came back to me. I'm just remembering the story." And it was like — and then you told me the story of you crossing the border, and God making His love known to you through Isaiah 43 and through "Come over the wall. Come to me, come to me." And I just — I mean, I was just blown away how that story for you got lost once you decided to work as hard at religion as you had at boxing.

LUIS: Nobody really preached to me the gospel on December 19th, but the way I came to have a relationship with Jesus and the Trinity itself — Himself — was because He showed Himself to me. Nobody ever said, preached — it wasn't an eloquent preaching. He just came and embraced me, and that day I knew how I didn't have to earn His love. He always loved me. How in the world did I lose that? I lost that.

WAYNE: That's what amazed me. Because when we first met — and even, I knew you for 10 years and you never told me that story, which I think is the most incredible story of someone coming to Jesus without human help since Paul on the road to Damascus got knocked off his horse.

LUIS: You're right. Right.

WAYNE: To me, it's such a profound sharing of God's reality, and knowing you were loved and all — you never told me that story.

LUIS: Every time I remember or tell about this story, I felt that — I felt His love, and the very thing I felt there. So when I'm alone at home, I keep remembering that, and that's the well I drink from today.

In my mind, I said, okay, I love you so much that I want to do this for you. And every time they said, "Can you do this?" Sure. "Can you do this?" Yes. And it became a burden. Going back to my daughter's

quinceañera — I remember that preaching. He was talking about Martha and Maria: how to be more like Martha, serve God, and also being a little bit like Maria. After I have this conversation with you, I came to realize that this man put a load on my daughter. He put more loads on her to go — instead of going like, "Look, God loves you. You're beautiful. You know, you're a princess." No, no, no. He just said, "Hey, be like that. Not enough — you keep working until you're like that." As if you need to. God accepts you as you are.

As I started talking and talking more with you, I started to grow in a different way. Like, I started talking to God — even when I was praying, differently. I was talking to Him as a friend, like you and I talk. And I start telling Him things like, "Look, I'm going through this. I am your son. You're my Father. So what are you going to do about this? It's your house. I'm not paying bills — you're the one paying the bill. So how are we going to take it? How are you going to take care of this?" Things like that, right? That really opened up a new chapter in my life, to the point that every time we talk — and as we speak right now — I feel this fire here. I always tell everybody, I feel this fire where the stomach ends and the rib cage begins. I feel this, like, emotion that want to just shout for joy. And every time we meet, it's the same thing. I remember sometimes when we meet, you asked me, "Do you have any questions for me?" And I would be like, "No, I just want you to talk. Just talk. Just say whatever, you know." Because everything you were saying, it's true.

Now — remember one time when you said — you said this: "Do you think of me as a boss?" I said, "What?" I thought it was like a weird question. I said, "Well, I work —" I said, "I want to say that I work with you and not for you." But then you looked at me, and he says, "If you look at me as a boss," he says, "you can no longer work for me." He says, "I want you to see me as a friend. I want to be your friend." That really hit me — how close of a relationship. And that really takes me back to God, how He wants us to be — not see Him like that, like the boss, like the master, that, okay, we have to — "Yes, master." You know, now I serve Him because I love Him, and I serve Him by loving everybody — but not by doing something I have to do religiously. Like, you know, when I speak with my kids — my boxers, you know, all my kids — I talk to them because I love them. I want to talk to them. They're funny. You know, I want to be there for them. My family, my wife — it's a totally different way of life.

WAYNE: The reason I asked you that question — I'd read something the night before, in some magazine article, some story. It was two Mexican people, and they were talking about the people they work for, and they were talking about being friends. And the one said, "Oh, you can never be friends with someone you work for," and the other one said, "Oh yeah, it's true. We have to pretend to be." And I was so broken when I read that. I'm going, man, I hope Luis isn't pretending with me — I hope — just because he works at my house sometimes. Because I think the friendship is real. I do. But you know, there's people — like when I was a pastor, people would ingratiate themselves to you just because you're the pastor, right? They're not going to tell you what they're really thinking. They're not going to tell you when you're being a bit of a jerk, because everybody wants you to like them and think well of them. And so that's why I asked you that day. I said, man, I want to know — am I really your friend? Is this really a friendship of equals — not you being nice to me because I pay you and you don't want to lose a job here? And I loved your response. Because to me, that's the most important thing — it's the friendship. And if we can be a blessing to you

financially while we're friends, then great.

To people I talk to about our relationship, I would say you're one of the closest friends in my life right now. You are. I've known people longer, I've known people whatever, but the depth of the journey that we share, and the depth of my care for your family and what I think about them, and your care for my family — my wife and my daughter and her family — I mean, there's a lot of care that comes back from you guys toward us, as well as the care that we share with you guys. And I love that. That's why I would hate to find out someday, "Oh, I'm just pretending to be your friend, because I don't want to lose my job."

LUIS: When you asked me that question, at first I was like, where did he get that from? Where that come from? Why — why that question? And then when you mentioned it, that you heard it somewhere, and it hurts you — when you say that it hurt you, I could see the depth of love, and I was like, wow. I remember telling my wife that, and she was crying, and she says, "Now I understand when you say that you'd give him a kidney." And then Andrea says, "Are you willing to give him both of your kidneys?" And then I — and I said, "Well, I —" and she said, "You don't love him that much, do you?" And I said, "Well, let's just say that I give him one kidney, okay? And part of my liver."

WAYNE: Fortunately, I don't need a kidney or a liver, so I'm in good shape.

It wasn't long before I started hearing stories of neighborhood kids who were seeking out Luis. It began over some neighbors wanting to learn boxing, but it soon took on a life of its own. Many of them came from difficult backgrounds, were struggling in school, and some were already being courted by gangs in the area that helped distribute drugs. The stories that spilled out were comical, poignant, and sometimes painful. Boxing was the excuse, but many of these kids just wanted to spend time with Luis, because they found him so engaging and life at home so challenging.

LUIS: Well, everything is tied up to making bricks. I've always had the opportunity to work with kids — always, always. Even, actually, they used to ask me — some of them, you know, neighbors — they knew I was a boxer, and they asked me if I could train them, and I said, "No, I don't have time. I can't," right? But it was after that dream, and working with you and meeting with you about, you know, making bricks — that's how everything started and got, you know, reignited — that love. I thought I loved them, you know, but I wasn't really, really focusing on and seeing really the pain that they're going through, and the change we can make — how we can impact them, you know, the way you have impacted me. You teach me how to make the bricks, and then I'll teach them — their lives that they have holes in it — and patch all the deficiencies.

This all started actually not this summer, but the summer before that. That's when I start training my kids — neighbors — and then it grew from the entire neighborhood and moved on to all other kids. Everything started with my little neighbors at home. You know, they're my neighbors — I know how critical their parents are. One of them, they call him *burro* — which means you're a donkey. And in Spanish, you call somebody donkey, you're calling them that they're really, really dumb. You know, he kept saying, "Probably when I grow up, I'm probably gonna work cutting grass or something like that, because my parents say I'm dumb." That would really, really hit me. And then I remember, on those conversations that

we had, I said, "Oh, no, no, no, no, no — there's so much more of you that you don't know." And we started talking, and they started showing up.

One day I was actually training outside — I hang a bag and I started boxing in it — and then one of them, he was knocking on the little side door, and he says, "Can we talk? Can we talk?" I said, "Sure, come in." I was so, so happy to see him. And then he says, "What are you doing?" I said, "Oh, I'm boxing." He says, "Boxing? That's amazing." He says yeah, and I look at him — his eyes just pop up — and I said, "Would you like to learn?" He says, "Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah." And I remember him saying — it was so engraved in him, what his parents told him — he says, "That way maybe I can achieve more." He says, "Maybe perhaps I can achieve more." And I said, "Oh — if you put your heart into it, you can do anything you want. You'll do amazing, you'll see." And I start teaching him. Then his brother came in, then the other neighbors — to the point that I have about, I don't know, 54 of them in Thousand Oaks and 39 in Simi.

WAYNE: And these are kids that have just come out of the woodwork — because of other relationships with other kids — just come and find you: "Would you teach us how to box?"

LUIS: Some of the kids that were fighting — other kids were bringing them, because they were telling them that they feel great when they're there. I can mention that. And I said, "Look, right here nobody's getting bullied." Because I have all the rules in writing — and they put all the rules in writing — like, you know, they have to do their homework, they have to respect their parents, they have to obey the laws, all that stuff. Some of them, they have a note from their parents saying, "Yes, you know, my kid" — and there's a name right there — "finished his homework," and I could see the signature. And then I said, "Did you fake this?" He was, "No, no, no, it's my mom's." And then I check with the mom, and it's true. Some of them start coming — not all of them are boxers. They just want to be there because they feel good. They want to talk. My daughters Jenny and Andrea, they have their hands full also, because there are some girls that come in and talk, and they talk with the kids also. They just want to be in a place where they're not yelled at.

Some of the kids — sometimes it's almost nine, and then I said, "Okay, I have to drive them home." Because they're not just neighbors anymore — they started coming from further away. I drive them home, and then they'll say things like, "Can we drive around again?" And I then understood why. And I said, "What's going on?" And they said, "Well, we like your company — want to, like, talk to you." And then one day the kid says, he says, "To be honest," he says, "I also want to tell you that I don't want to go home. I don't want to go home, because as soon as I walk through that door, same thing again — I'm gonna be beat up, I'm gonna be yelled at."

And I have very serious cases I can tell you about — kids that they've been doing really bad, and now they're doing amazing. I have one of the kids that — it's okay, man — I'm sorry, I'm sorry — he was doing really bad. He was the black sheep of the family. He was beat up every day at home. He went to juvie. But somehow he cleaned his act. He started coming with us, he started doing everything right — making right decisions, breaking up bad patterns of destruction, like leaving certain friendships — and started hanging out with us, and boxing with us, and going to tournaments with us. He's the kid that went to Oxnard and

fought a fight without even — they didn't even go to fight; we went just to watch a fight, and there was an opportunity, because it was an exhibition. On a sanctioned fight, you can't, because you have to be licensed. And — it was — he joined the Marines, and he just finished — he graduated the other day. An amazing kid.

WAYNE: You were working with youth at the church you were attending, and having a weekly night with youth. And even that trajectory changed for those kids, right? It was less about the meeting and getting to the study — it was about loving the kids, listening to kids. And the kids are really drawn to you, and to get together with the other kids, than they are being part of the church. Which doesn't always excite the parents, or others that are around them, or the leadership that's over the church.

LUIS: Oh, no, no. I got actually a lot of criticism. Criticism is an understatement.

WAYNE: As Luis was growing more secure in God's love, he didn't need to jump through all the religious hoops he'd been jumping through for the past 25 years. He still loved the people there, but he no longer felt the need to attend every service or the early morning prayer meetings that leaders were expected to attend. A significant part of his life was now taken up with these kids, and he knew that's where God wanted him. And instead of teaching them all the things they should do to be good Christians, he was teaching them how much God loved them and wanted to walk with them. Soon the pressure began for Luis to make these kids attend church, and he wouldn't do it. The leaders assumed he was backsliding and no longer as committed as he used to be. Rumors rippled through the congregation in hopes of discrediting him for not following the religious life they had taught him. Many grew concerned that he would not be the best influence on the church kids, and worried about the neighborhood kids coming to the church, especially when it caused problems.

Father Greg Boyle was a young priest fresh out of seminary when he was assigned to a parish between the two largest gangs in Los Angeles. He took it as his personal mission to love those kids into a different way of life. He tells his story in *Tattoos on the Heart*, which is as engaging a story of the power of love as I've ever read. He not only spent time with them, but created Homeboy Industries to give them their first line on a résumé that could lead them out of the gangs and into a more productive life. His is a powerful story of how love can change lives, and how at-risk kids can find a hope and a future. Watching Luis these days is like having a ringside seat for what the early days of Father Boyle's ministry must have looked like. His kids are not as hardened, but many of them were on a course that would have led them into crime. And it isn't easy. One night Luis received a threatening call from a man who was head of a local gang. He warned Luis to stay away from his kids, because he wouldn't tolerate Luis breaking his family apart. But Luis doesn't back down easily, and gently told him that the kids would be welcome. That didn't set well with him, so he devised his own plan to get the kids kicked out of the group.

LUIS: Some of the kids that go there, they were part of a local gang, and it got really bad, to the point that the gang, you know, found out. He felt he was competing — I was actually stealing his, according to him. He called — he calls them "my kids." He said, "You're stealing my kids." So in order to prove themselves to them, they started vandalizing the church, right? Now, they were doing it against their will. Because at

first — because they see, they know what path — they said, "We love you, but you know, this guy..." You know, they were seeking love, and this guy kept telling them, "No — you're here on the gang, you're gonna have love, you're gonna have protection. And protection you don't have at home, you'll have it here." And they start finding out — they felt that love and protection when you're with us. To the point that I talked to them. I said, "You have to make a decision." Because they vandalized the church — the same kids, four times — and even the police got involved. So I gave them an ultimatum: "Either — you know, if you want to ride with them, that's fine, I respect that — but you cannot be here, because the other kids are watching that." So they decided to stay with us. And that brought me a lot of heat from certain leaders. They start seeing them, and one — they went as far as call them criminals, in front of me, in their face — they were there. He says, "What are they doing here, the bunch of criminals?" That really hurt me. It really deeply hurt me. I remember walking towards them — all four of them — I huddled with them, and I said, "These are my kids, and they're not what you say they are. They're not criminals. So they're gonna stay here." And then he says, "Just keep them away from my kid."

WAYNE: That attitude will come back to haunt that elder in our next episode, in a way he could never imagine. It isn't easy engaging these kids, between the threats of the gangs and the demands and lack of support from his church friends. But Luis keeps navigating it, because of his deep love for these kids. They let him into their deepest hurts, and he shows them how precious they are to God.

LUIS: I want to help others. I have this love, therefore I can extend it. Now when I go to church, I start going for a different reason. Because I started, you know, coaching these kids, you know, boxing, and then they started coming to the youth group, and I started going for a different reason — because, you know, Jesus loves them, and I love them. And I started viewing people differently. I started viewing you different.

WAYNE: It never ceases to amaze me how God weaves His work into our lives. As a little boy, Luis collected horse manure to sell to a brick maker in Mexico. Forty years later, God gives Luis a dream about brick making that opens up a conversation He wanted us to have. I love how He pulls those threads together as a sign of His presence with us. But what happens when a group of non-religious kids are required to attend a youth retreat as punishment for vandalizing the church facility, or face criminal charges? Sounds more like a setup for a comedy, doesn't it? No, it doesn't quite work out that way. Loving kids on the margin of society is fraught with peril, as we'll see next time on My Friend Luis...

LUIS: When you love much, you hurt much. And especially this last year — you know, we lost three kids. Two of them committed suicide, and one of them got killed by gangs, when he went back to tell them that he was no longer part of the gang. And it really breaks your heart.

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This transcript was generated from the episode audio and lightly edited for readability: paragraph breaks and speaker labels were added, and obvious transcription errors were corrected. The speakers' own words and phrasing have been preserved.