



Wanted: A Spiritual Pursuit Through Jail, Among Outlaws, and Across Borders

Chris Hoke

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Interweaving his own story with moving vignettes and gritty experiences in hidden places, a jail chaplain and minister to Mexican gang and migrant worker communities chronicles his spiritual journey to the margins of society and reveals a subversive God who's on the loose beyond the walls of the church, pursuing those who are unwanted by the world.

Wanted follows a restless young man from the sunny suburbs of his youth to the darker side of society in the rainy Northwest, where he finds the direct spiritual experience he's been seeking while volunteering as a "night shift" chaplain at a men's correctional facility. The jail becomes his portal to a mysterious world on the margins of society, where a growing network of Mexican gang members soon dub him their "pastor." As he comes to terms with this uncomfortable title—and embraces the role of a shepherd of black sheep—his adventures truly begin.

Hoke shares comic, heartbreak and sublime tales of sacred moments in unlikely situations: singing with an attempted-suicide in the jail's isolation cell, dodging immigration and airport security with migrant farm workers, and fly-fishing with tattooed gangsters. Set against the misty Washington landscape, this unconventional congregation at times mirrors the Skagit Valley's fleeting migratory swans and unseen salmon. But Hoke takes us with him into riskier terrain as he gains and loses friends to the prison system, and even faces his own despair—as well as belovedness—on the back of a motorcycle racing through Guatemalan slums.

In these stories of "mystical portraiture," like the old WANTED posters of outlaws, Hoke bears witness to an elusive Presence that is still alive and defiant of official custody. Such portraits offer a new vision of the forgotten souls who have been cast into society's dumpsters, helping us see beneath even the hardest criminal a fragile desire to be wanted.

Wanted: A Spiritual Pursuit Through Jail, Among Outlaws, and Across Borders **Details**

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From Reader Review Wanted: A Spiritual Pursuit Through Jail, Among Outlaws, and Across Borders for online ebook

Drew says

I'm very glad I read this book. It is an important indictment of our incarceration system and of the way societies throw people away. I'm grateful for those like the author who love the outcasts no matter what and in all circumstances--a witness to a grace that will not be defeated.

Mike says

There are some great things in this book. Hoke's ministry to people in prison, and his pastoring of those who've been in trouble with the law in a variety of ways is admirable, and shows the way in which Jesus works through lives that seem lost and hopeless.

It's also interesting to read about Hoke's own journey and how he's 'found his vocation', as it were, bit by bit over the years.

There are some extraordinary characters here too: people who've found Christ, or Christ's love shown through others, and who have come up from the garbage heap and turned their lives around. There are also people who were on the brink of doing this, and fell back into their old lives again, people whose lives ended abruptly.

So it's a real mix of hope and distress, pain and joy.

All that said, it's also rather hard going. At one point Hoke talks about his admiration for the book, *A River Runs Through It* and you almost get the impression that he's based his writing style on that reflective, slow-paced, nature-descriptive approach. He also takes things out of chronological order so that he can focus on different people at different times. For me this meant that I couldn't always line up where he was in his ministry, what he'd done by a certain point and what he hadn't.

There's no doubt that Hoke can write well, but sometimes you just want to get on with what he's got to say about someone and not spend a lot of time getting there.

Still, it's a great testament to the work of Christ in people's lives, most of whom in these stories, are Christians outside the normal church scene.

Sara-Kay says

Phenomenal. Hoke writes beautifully about his experiences as a night-shift chaplain at a men's correctional facility. The emotional range of these stories is breathtaking -- I was crying one minute, guffawing the next, jittering with my heart-pounding in suspense another, sitting silent in numb disbelief the next. You get the idea. Go ahead and put this one at the top of your to-read list. Both the stories themselves and the graceful prose through which they are told are stunning.

Sarah Sanderson says

Just a gem.

Jonathan Hiskes says

Hard to know what to say about this one. Chris, my dear friend, takes the way and words of Jesus more seriously than anyone I know. He follows him into the darkest corners of our world – jails, solitary confinement wards, migrant camps, Central American slums. And he *finds* Jesus in the tattooed, scarred faces of homies just as hungry as Chris for a glimpse of the beloved. Over and over in this book, small gatherings of wounded young men erupt into laughter at a surprise banquet prepared before them – the grace of bread & wine appearing where the world has done its best to forbid them. These are beautiful stories, told with an undisguised love for particular corners of creation, and an even more acute love for people who discover, despite society's desperate claims otherwise, that they are *wanted*, in the most wonderful sense.

Eric says

Finished in 3 days. It's like a true crime drama meets Annie Dillard.

Lauren says

I wanted to hate this book. To be cynical and antagonistic to the cheesy, bible thumping, over reaching story that had to be between the covers, but I couldn't. Regardless of what religion you believe in (if any at all), this story is about empathy and connection and finding the things that we all have in common as human beings with hearts and brains.

Noah says

disclaimer on this review: Chris is a good friend of mine that I look up to, so this review will no doubt be biased. But that's ok. It really IS a great book.

I came across this line in a book I read recently: "I never found a club or clan or idea that was more important to me than the men and women who believed in it." And I see in Wanted, and in Chris in this book, a type of love for people that gets Chris to where he is - finding God, maybe, through the people. I think what most struck me about Wanted was how truly misleading the term 'jail chaplain' really is, at first, because I see Chris not so much starting his vocation as a way to help others, but to help himself, in a true way - he finds in these criminals not the surface scars and bad behaviors, but a vulnerability and openness that gives him life. He in turn gives life as well, but what really struck me was that concept of hanging out with the tax collectors and prostitutes, as it were, not so much to help them as to learn from them, as to get from them the connection and openness he was missing elsewhere.

Maybe it's a subtle shift, but for me a big one, to think about helping others not as helping others - maybe that comes later - but as, "I'll go where I find openness and life-giving relationships." I found that refreshing.

I loved: "Most men who come to our bible studies I can welcome as tragic extensions of my own

hypothetical selves." and "Growing up in many churches, I never found them to be raw or extremely honest places." The progression of searching for and finding oneself, and God, only in the places that create and with the people that exude openness and honesty, runs throughout Wanted.

Finally: "What I did know - and what I still know now - is that there was more going on than what I or anyone else could fully see. A banquet I had never imagined had broken into this padlocked dumpster. And it could be continuing still, deep in places I would never expect. What else could be happening that we will never hear of, nor see? 'We walk by faith, not by sight,' Neaners often said. 'That's us.'"

That last quote sums up so much of this book, and so much of Chris.

Todd says

Because of his willingness to tell hard truths about himself and his subjects, Chris Hoke's portraits of the men he has learned from and loved during his prison ministry transcends the syrupy, feel-good triumphalism so common in memoirs about ministry. Hoke is able to provide damning illustrations of the dehumanizing effects of prison policies--and even prison itself--without valorizing the men in those prisons or the officers working in those prisons. While set in dark places, the book does not wallow in the darkness but illuminates the world with brilliant flashes of grace.

karen says

i have decided to be honest with myself and admit that i'm never going to review this, and then i can take it off my massive "review pending" shelf and feel that much less stress in my life. this isn't something i ever intended to read, but it was sort of pushed at me back when i was reading for the bn discover program and they needed more reads on it. it was *fine*, but i had read *Ghettoside: A True Story of Murder in America* pretty much right before this, and i felt that some of the events and attitudes depicted here were a bit irresponsible, after reading what was a much more academic and realistic book about crime, criminals, and the legal system in this country. i was planning to reread (or re-skim) the book and point to specific examples of this, but that has been the plan for THREE YEARS now, and i have very little interest in revisiting a book that i wasn't crazy about in the first place when there are 75 other reviews i need to get to in addition to all the nonbook stuff in my life. so, i'm calling it - time of acceptance: now.

Tim Otto says

Kale for the soul

If you struggle with doubt as I do, this book will fortify your soul. Chris Hoke tells the terrifying truth in both its pain and joy. It's exactly what we humans need to nourish faith.

Carolyn says

Okay we're going to do this review.

I'm in Calculus right now and I'm crying.

I'm crying

In the middle of my CALC CLASS

Congratulations Chris Hoke, if that was your goal, you have fully accomplished it.

At least making me look doubly embarrassing in this dead silent post-quiz environment.

I am now going to spend the next half hour convincing you, whoever the reader of this review may be or convincing perhaps empty space, that you should take every other book off the top of your to read list (besides of course the Bible and perhaps some of @cslewis' masterpieces) and replace it with

THIS

yes this. listen up, it's the oddest most perfect compelling mix of people and God.

It's the most balanced chaotic cambrian explosion of grace and love and miracles (sans the disgusting cheesiness) but with all these subtle epiphanies on our culture war, legalism, the lost, and how we see people.

Yes you, and me.

He's 26. In jail for attempted murder, four counts of drug abuse, maybe even dealing. Illegal immigrant perhaps.

Who do we see that as?

A number. The ill of this country. The cause of all our problems, enabler of our children's drug addiction, challenger of our city's safety.

Tell me. Do we ever, ever see criminals as human? Does society? We mass incarcerate so many people. As if the minute they go behind jail they're no longer deserving of love or respect. They've voided their humanity.

inserting a segment solely for believers

Humans are all fallen correct.

We are all similar. What if we were in that situation. Raised in a broken household, factor in abuse, misery, betrayal, being hated, being tasered on the ground while multiple officers stood around you like you were a dog. Factor in a lifetime of running from the government, self worth based on power and violent strength, everyone you know in the drug dealing business.

What kind of recipe is this but one for people to end up in prison.

But stories don't end halfway, and certainly certainly not the ones God writes.

I kinda want to brush off every review I've ever written of prose. There's no power in flowery words that don't say anything. The combination of a story this size and a prose this profound practically married into

i don't know

apocalyptic standards.

If Jesus were our contemporary, somewhere out there, among us, where would we find him? And if we found him, would we join him or be offended by him?

And the greatest thing about having Hoke writing this book, that it's a sort of autobiography that's not about him. It's about God's stories, but the voice is so real because the perspective comes from Hoke's perspective. And its in these places, in the jails, among the convicts. That's where the story starts so much larger than anything we can imagine. Grace is larger when the pain is greater.

And then you wonder what's missing in our churches, in our sermons when you hear convicts say things like

How they look at us. They don't see what's happening out here and I'm talking about the church, too. I don't wanna be too hard on the church, but so much of the help or love they give comes with conditions. Like pastors who are supporting the auto detailing shop are asking me: If guys gonna work with me, they're gonna have to come to church with us, too right? Ramon sounded impatient, "For me, it's not about who comes to church. It's being-what's the word?-transformed. And who's there to see it."

Quoting Hoke

Growing up in many churches, I never found them to be raw or extremely honest places-not places where you could show the worst side of yourself. But I found the jail to be a place where inmates didn't have the option to hide their problems. Hard as one may try with weak laughter or macho fronts, you can't pretend your life is working out for you when you're locked in the county jail.

And in this place, in these rooms of unadorned life, I found something that clergy call sacrament, mysteries I could feel.

if I could, I'd copy as many passages and stories into this tiny space bar as I could. Shove them all at you, or the space of whoever's casually past this.

Have Chris tell you of Richard, and Jenkins, and Pipe, Donacio, Neaner,

they never end. There's so many. And it's weird how the way he writes it, I think of these people as real people.

Oh on an entirely different side note, finding these people on twitter is like running my face into a wall. There's pictures of them, pulling names out of a surreal literary world. Into reality. This. Is. Actually. Real

I really wish I could meet someone like Chris Hoke, but in reality.

Pause

Hit the rewind

I already have. It's Christ, and that was the whole total purpose of this autobiography.

So I have no idea what I just said

Kudos to me

Hi Mr. Hoke, wow to you too

but damn, this cambrian explosion of God's grace utterly destroys anything I have ever known.

Becky Nasralla says

Very eye-opening and shows the extent of spiritual warfare and the compassion of those called to minister .

John says

I appreciate what Hoke is doing (and maybe even moreso, the evocative way he writes about it). I kept having this sneaking suspicion that Hoke was willing to kick doctrine (or at least dogma) to the curb, in order to emphasize a certain kind of approach to life. I recognize that response could be more about me than him. I love the approach, but I need the dogma, too.

Ryan says

Ever since I heard Chris Hoke on Snap Judgment I was hoping and hoping he would put a book out because that podcast moved me deeply.

I loved this book and the way he shares the stories of the way the people he is serving teach him. The stories and writing are so real and beautiful. I grateful for people like Bob Ekblad and Chris that are sharing their stories and reaching the people society wants to throw away, following Jesus into the places the rest of us avoid and showing us how to love and SEE people.
