

Rarely Told Origin Stories of Jesus: His Odd Family Tree

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Date: 11 December 2016

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[0 : 00] Father, we confess before you that sometimes we find your word pretty boring and completely and utterly incomprehensible. But Father, we stand before you confessing at this time that we are not the center of the universe and your word doesn't have to just speak in a way which is easily digestible immediately for us at whatever stage of life we're in.

But that it is your word not only to us but to every people group on the planet and every people group that has ever existed and every people group that will exist until your son returns.

That Father, it is always a contemporary and direct word to us. And so Father, we ask that you would gently but deeply pour out your Holy Spirit upon us.

Pour out your Holy Spirit upon us that we might listen and learn from your word. And this we ask in Jesus' name. Amen. Please be seated. Most of you probably know I'm a child of immigrants. My parents immigrated from Belfast, Northern Ireland. And I was born about a year after they came to Canada. Back in the day when you had to save up money or go into debt to have babies.

[1 : 19] That used to happen in Canada. And so my parents immigrated from Belfast and they moved to Montreal. And after a little while, when I was a teenager, my family moved from Ottawa to Montreal.

So I'm really a city guy. From Montreal to Ottawa, sorry. So I'm really a city guy. I have no real particular roots other than the roots which are very shallow, which, you know, I've planted since I've been here.

After I had been a pastor for about just three years, I got moved way up the Ottawa Valley to a place called Eganville.

And in small town, rural Ontario, it's really a different world than the cities. Like it's just different in so many ways. Some of you can remember the story I told about a woman that one day she told me, because she was a bit anxious, she said, You know, George, I was reading the telephone book the other day and I didn't recognize some of the names.

And it's made me realize how much Eganville has changed. I mean, who reads a phone book? Who reads a phone book to think about all the different people that you're coming across?

[2 : 31] But that's what real life was like. And this isn't like, I know I look like I could be talking about the 18th century because I'm getting old. But this is not that long ago that this was happening.

And in that community, it made a big difference for those whose last name was Lett, L-E-T-T, whether you were a black Lett or a red Lett.

And it didn't describe, oh my, look at that, all of a sudden there's light. It doesn't describe the hair color or anything, but it goes back to this, the distinction goes back well over 100 years earlier when two brothers came and one had red hair and one had black hair.

And over 100 years later, it still made a difference in that community whether you were a black Lett or a red Lett. I remember asking one person once, how can I tell if you're a black Lett or a red Lett? And they said, well, you would never be able to tell, but we all know.

And it made a difference. And I can remember speaking to one fellow, and he was about 70, and he and his wife, they'd been married many, many years, but God had just never given them children.

[3 : 38] They were childless. And one of the great things which was weighing on his heart as a sorrow is that he was the fifth generation on the family farm and that that would die with him because he was childless.

There would not be a sixth generation of them with their last name living on that farm. So when we read something, when we hear something like a genealogy, which was just read by Daniel a few

minutes ago, that just seems for many of us living in a city like Ottawa, and many of us are immigrants as well, and we don't have particular roots.

It's really sort of an incomprehensible thing to us. And frankly, we often find it a little bit boring. But the Bible is not just written for us, and it's not just written for what we like to read, the type of genre we like to read right now.

I can remember when I was six years old, I remember going up to my dad and telling my dad that he should start reading Hardy Boy novels because Hardy Boy novels were so fantastic.

And I can remember as a six-year-old and seven-year-old, I couldn't understand why more people didn't read Hardy Boy novels because they were so good. Well, that was my, you know, so if God had written the Bible so I could read it at that age like a Hardy Boy novel, like now I would not like it, right?

[5 : 00] And so God has caused the Bible to be written in such a way that it does speak to every people group on the planet. And that will mean some people groups will go, oh, wow, a genealogy.

And other people groups will go, oh, gosh, this is so boring. How on earth does God want to have any friends or followers if he writes stuff which is so boring?

Well, we're not the center of the universe. And I don't know if my friend who is the fifth generation on the farm, I don't know if he's alive or dead now. I don't know if he found the genealogies like this boring.

But I know that for many people in the world, things like genealogies are actually really, really important. So we're going to look at this really apparently boring story.

And believe it or not, God actually tells us very powerful things about the gospel through this apparently boring genealogy. Believe it or not, he says shocking and very powerful things through this literary form that we don't find very appealing or many of us don't find very appealing.

[6 : 11] So it would be very helpful if you get your Bibles out. And we're going to go through the genealogy. Not every single word am I going to comment on, but enough for you to understand God actually is doing something really surprising and really shocking and really powerful through this genealogy.

So if you can find it in your Bibles, it's Matthew chapter 1, verse 1. And we'll just read the first verse. And it goes like this. We'll read more, but I'll read the first verse right now. The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham.

And in the original language, there's no verbs in that sentence. It's just the genesis or the genealogy of Jesus, Messiah, the son of David, the son of Abraham.

And here's the first point. If you could put that up, that would be really great. What Matthew tells us right off the bat is that Matthew is not telling a once upon a time story. He is telling a true story about what really happened.

He does this in a very, very powerful way with his opening words. Matthew is not telling a once upon a time story. He is telling a true story about what really happened.

[7 : 21] You know, for Matthew's readers, they were used to the stories, the myths about Hercules. They knew all these stories. You know, even his Jewish audience would have known many of the pagan stories.

And so at the very, very beginning, Matthew's trying to tell, I am not telling you a story like a myth about Hercules or any other type of myth. It's not a once upon a time story. I'm telling you a true story about what really, really happened.

And this word that's translated as Genesis or Genealogy, it can be translated either way. I'm going to tell you the origin, the genealogy. But in the ancient world, it was a signal that this is now, the genre is history.

Not fantasy, not myth, not moral illumination, but history. That's what he's going to be doing. And so what Matthew is telling us right off the bat is that the gospel is good news about Jesus.

And he's going to be telling you the true story about Jesus. So he's really making a very, very clear distinction between spirituality and most religion and what he's about to do.

[8 : 32] Because most religion and spirituality, the stories, it doesn't really matter whether or not they actually happened. The purpose of the stories is either to give you some type of spiritual illumination or moral illumination or specific advice in terms of the type of life you need to live.

But it's really all about advice in terms of other processes. And Matthew's saying, no, no, no, this isn't like religion. It's not like spirituality. I'm going to tell you some history. I'm going to tell you the

history, the origin stories of the person of Jesus.

And this is really important for us because he's going to make a claim that the good news is something that is actually true and is actually real. That the story that I'm going to tell you is actually more like listening, well, reading about your financial statement.

Or it's more like reading a newspaper account of what happened in a hockey game. Or it's more like reading how the inauguration when Trump becomes president or when Trudeau became prime minister and he read newspaper accounts of what happened in that event.

What Matthew is saying is that what I'm about to read and tell you about is more like that than the religious and spiritual and irreligious stories that you hear.

[9 : 57] That's, by the way, one of the reasons why as the gospel grabs us, Christians end up being concerned about the true and the real. That's why science developed in a Christian context. Because it's right in the very, very beginning origin stories of Jesus that the true and the real matters.

And so things like science start to make sense to human beings because they want to try to figure out what's true and what's real. Now, some of you might say, George, if that's the case, I've read some, you know, I've heard some blogs.

I've read some talks. My friends have read people like Hitchens and Dawkins. And they talk about how these genealogy and these types of stories that they're actually very, very inaccurate and untrue. So, George, if you're actually saying that Matthew is claiming that this is true, then how is it that so many people say that the story, the very genealogy that he uses, that that's inaccurate? Well, what Matthew would say if he was here was, look at how I began. Look again, it says the book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham.

And Matthew would say, I know that Abraham wasn't David's daddy. And I know that David wasn't Jesus's daddy.

[11 : 17] I know that there's 600 to 1,000 year gap between Abraham and David. And I know there's 1,000 year gap between David and Jesus. I'm not claiming that I'm writing an exhaustive genealogy.

So don't get mad at me. I'm claiming that I'm giving you these significant but accurate stepping stones that lead to Jesus.

And that's what Matthew does. It's not exhaustive, but you can't fault him for being exhaustive when in his very opening sentence he tells you he's not being exhaustive. He's talking about significance. So he's talking about significance. And that made me think of a funeral that I went to quite a few years ago when I was still part of the Anglican Church of Canada. And it was a funeral of a priest. I think he was just in his late 60s. He died suddenly of a heart attack. And he'd been retired for a couple of years. So the funeral service was packed, really packed.

[12 : 25] I came in just at the start of it. I didn't want a robe. I didn't know the man. And I was just a real young whippersnapper pastor. But I slipped in at the back where there was a bit of a standing-only crowd at the back of the church.

And when it came time for the eulogy, the fellow who was up at the front giving the eulogy about the fellow, he was going on and on and on about how great a man he was.

And then he said something about he was a very, very sober thinker. And at this point in time, standing two away from me was a minister who'd been removed from the ministry.

He was no longer a minister. And in a voice that wasn't loud enough that everybody in the church would hear, but people within about four or five of him could hear. As soon as the guy had said how sober this priest was, the guy said, except for those times when he'd make hash brownies and give them out to all of us.

Ha, ha, ha, ha, ha. And except for those times he smoked up. Ha, ha, ha, ha, ha. And except for those times he'd get drunk. And then the guy would go on up at the front, eulogy about how much he loved his family.

[13 : 31] And this guy beside us would say, except for the times he went to the strip club. Ha, ha, ha, ha. And all the way through the eulogy, this guy gave a rude commentary on the deceased's life.

It was one of those things. On one hand, it was very, very funny. On the other hand, it was very, very shocking and inappropriate. And you didn't know whether you should be asking God to forgive you for laughing or if you should just laugh.

And actually, in this apparently boring genealogy, Matthew does something like the fellow at the side did while the eulogy was going on at the front.

Because, you know, in eulogies, you don't tell about all the bad things that go on. Usually, you try to put the best face on the person who's died. But Matthew actually fills this genealogy with really naughty, shocking things about Jesus' ancestors.

Maybe some of you noticed it, maybe you didn't. Look again at verse 2. Abraham was the father of Isaac, and Isaac the father of Jacob, and Jacob the father of Judah and his brothers.

[14:35] Now, just pause. Who is Jacob? We know why Jacob's on this list and not Esau? Jacob is on the list rather than Esau because Jacob conspired with his mother to steal the birthright from Esau.

That's why he's there. His mom overheard the dad saying, I'm going to give you the sort of the blessing that sort of gives you sort of control of the, like, basically like an inheritance speech.

I'm about to do that. Could you go get something for me to eat? And the mom said, listen, Esau is going to go off and get this. I want you to get the inheritance, Jacob. So the mom went and made some food and dressed Jacob up as if he was Esau, having him wear his clothes and all sorts of other things because the dad was blind.

And so Jacob goes in and steals the inheritance from his brother. That's the guy on the list. This is one of Jesus' forebears. And afterwards, Esau was so mad that the mom said to Jacob, you better get out of the country or otherwise Esau is going to kill you.

And this is the same guy. Jacob is the same guy when 20, 25 years later, he feels he has to come back to the family home. His blind dad's still alive. And this is the same guy.

[16:01] By this point in time, Jacob now has a whole pile of kids. And what does he do? This is in the Bible. He sends, as he's coming close to where Esau is, he's so worried that Esau still has a murderous rage and that Esau is going to murder him, that what he does is he divides his family and his belongings up into groups.

Why? His hope is that when the first group of children and the first wife comes to Esau and he kills all of them, and then the concubine with some kids comes up and Esau kills all of them, and then the next concubine comes up with some kids and Esau kills all of them, Jacob's hoping that by the time Esau has killed all those people, he's tired of killing and he'll let Jacob live.

This is Jesus' ancestor. And look what else, the very next verse, verse 3, And Judah the father of Perez and Zerah by Tamar.

Whoa, whoa, whoa, whoa, whoa, whoa. Why does he put that in? Well, first of all, like to a lot of Jewish people, he's gone ahead and he's broken protocol by putting a woman in, period.

But who is this Judah and Tamar? Well, I'll tell you how it is. In the ancient world, to guarantee inheritance, and the Jewish Bible, the Old Testament talks about this, to guarantee inheritance, we'll use my family as an example.

[17:25] Let's say my oldest son, Tosh, he marries somebody. He's not able to produce a child, an heir, and then he dies. And so in the ancient world, my second son, Jesse, would have been required to marry Tosh's wife so that he could produce a child that would guarantee Tosh's inheritance.

And if Jesse died, then the next son would have to marry Tosh's wife. And so that's what happened here to Judah. His first son is married to Tamar, and he dies with no heir.

So Judah gives the second son, and the second son dies, leaving no heir. And the third son is too young to be married. And so Judah says to Tamar, I can pronounce your name differently, just wait a few years, and when this lad's old enough, he'll marry you to produce an heir.

And Tamar later on realizes that Judah's, the third son's old enough, and he hasn't been given. So what does she do? She dresses up like a prostitute, and acts like a prostitute, and Judah sleeps with her.

And he doesn't have the money to pay. He's the John who doesn't have the money to pay. And so he leaves a pledge, and then she disappears.

[18:42] And then, this is Jesus' ancestor. Judah hears that Tamar is pregnant, and he says, you've got to kill her for adultery. And before she gets killed, she says, here's the tokens of the father.

And Judah realizes it's his tokens. So he spares her. That's Jesus' ancestor. Let's go down a little bit farther.

You didn't realize this genealogy was so racy, did you? Yeah. You're probably saying, good grief, they do all these types of things. Okay, well, you just go down.

And Ram was the father, verse 4, was Aminadab. And Aminadab, the father of Nashon. And Nashon, the father of Salmon. And Salmon, the father of Boaz by Rahab. Who's Rahab? A prostitute from Jericho.

It's in the Bible. I'm not making that up. That's who she is. And Boaz, the father of Obed by Ruth. And Obed, the father of Jesse. And Jesse, the father of David, the king. And David was the father of Solomon by the wife of Uriah.

[19 : 47] Whoa, my gosh. They put that in the genealogy. Because as you all know, Uriah was one of David's trusted friends who'd risked his life many times to save David's life.

That's who Uriah was. He was listed as one of David's mighty men. And when Uriah was off protecting the king, David had eyes for Bathsheba.

He slept with her and made her pregnant. His friend's wife, he made her pregnant. And when she lets David know that he's made her pregnant, he brings Uriah back to try to get Uriah to sleep with his wife, Bathsheba, so that he would mistakenly think the baby was his.

But Uriah is too honorable to do that because he doesn't want to take a privilege that his fighting brothers doesn't have. And so he never sleeps with his wife, so David has him murdered.

And they put that in the genealogy. I'll just give you one more thing. Go down a little bit to verse 10. And Hezekiah, the father of Manasseh, and Manasseh, the father of Amos or Amon.

[21 : 06] Who's Manasseh? Manasseh was a king who reintroduced fertility worship into Israel in a particular way, which meant, and this is how he worshipped, is that I'd say, you know, now I say to Louise, I'm off to a prayer meeting and she doesn't worry.

But Manasseh would have said to his wife, I'm off to worship the gods, which would mean he'd go to sleep with the temple prostitutes. But that's not bad enough. This king practiced human sacrifice. In fact, he practiced child sacrifice. And he not only brought this into Israel and encouraged it, he himself sacrificed his own children to the gods.

He murdered his own children as an act of homage to a bloody deity. And he's famous in the book of Kings for having been responsible for the deaths of thousands and thousands and thousands of people.

This is Jesus' genealogy. So here's the point, if you could put it up. This lot could not produce a Messiah.

[22 : 21] This lot could not produce a Messiah. Only God could. This isn't evolution. This isn't breeding. This isn't like when you watch the crown and you maybe think about how great a queen, Queen Elizabeth II is.

And then you think about how great her father was. And maybe you go back for several generations and maybe see how this, you know, there's all this wonderful culture and biology, you know, culminating.

No, no, no, no, no, no. Matthew's saying this lot could not produce a Messiah savior. Only God could. Only God could.

And, in fact, rather than thinking of this as being some spectacular example of breeding and ascending to something, you need to understand that it's more like God invading and doing what only God could do.

That God, in a sense, almost saying, enough, we know this lot is never going to produce a Messiah. I'm going to have to do it. And it's, you know, it's so wonderful. It tells you something about the gospel.

[23 : 24] It tells you about the gospel. It's that this frank confession of the history of sin shows you that it's not as if human beings had reached some pinnacle of holiness, and then God decides to send a savior.

But in the face of moral, I mean, there's some heroes in this list and absolute evil people and moral ambiguity.

In the midst of all of this, God sends a savior even though it's not what's wanted. And it means that God is familiar with the history of sin. So that when I respond to the gospel by giving my life to Jesus, God is familiar with my history of sin and still he sends a savior.

It's a profound comfort that God knows the history of sin. And it's because he knows the history of sin that he sends a savior.

And the other thing about it, which is just so, you know, I said how the gospel leads you in the earlier thing about being concerned for the real and the true, because God is doing something in the real and the true.

[24 : 35] And it also helps us to understand that part of our concern for the real and true is always to take God into account. That in fact, if there really is a God who really does exist, the ones who are most dealing with reality are not atheists, but the ones who realize there is a God that you always need to take account of when you're talking about anything.

Whether it's economics, whether it's physics, whether it's biology, whether it's the newspaper, whether it's politics, whether it's ideology, you can't think and live and move as if God does not exist and you do not have to take him into account in your theories.

It's as the story takes root in us that we realize that this is so powerful. But some of you might say, George, okay, well, that genealogy was very revelatory.

I didn't realize, and I'm guessing, George, you didn't tell all of the naughty parts, and I didn't tell you all the naughty parts. There's lots of naughty parts in that genealogy. But, George, doesn't it prove too much?

Like, George, that spectacularly proves that Jesus is human. But you believe he's God. This genealogy proves that Jesus is human, George.

[25 : 57] It proves too much. And that's a really good comment. Look at verse 16 at the end of it.

We're not going to read all of the begats or the fathers. And here's how the list works. If you have an old King James version of the Bible, it uses the word, I think it goes, and David begat Solomon by the wife of Uriah, and Solomon begat Rehobam, and Rehobam begat.

And that's actually more literal. And it would be more literal to either use the word begat, which nobody would know what that is anymore. They might, I don't know what they think it is. It would be a cat?

Like, I don't know. That doesn't make anything. Or fathered. Okay? And the way the genealogy works is you have over 30 consecutive fathered. Abraham fathered.

This fathered. This fathered. This fathered. This fathered. And then you come to verse 16, you've had like, I think, 31 consecutive fathereds that you've come up with. There's more than that.

[26 : 56] It's over 40. All these fathered, fathered, fathered, fathered. You come to verse 16, and Jacob fathered Joseph, the husband of Mary, of whom Jesus was born, who's called Christ.

The rhythm's broken. Jesus isn't fathered. He's not begat. In fact, it uses the, it implies that Mary begat him.

Here's the, if you could put it up, the next point. In a world where every baby is fathered, Jesus was born of Mary. In a world where every baby is fathered, Jesus was born of Mary.

You see, that's also part of the significance of how the whole genealogy looked. Look up at verse one again. The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham.

Here's what's so shocking about that. If you go back and read the Old Testament from cover to cover, and every time they tell you a genealogy, what matters is the person who's first. So it'll tell you David and all those who flow from David.

[28 : 09] It'll tell you Abraham and those who flow from Abraham. It'll tell you Aaron who flows from Aaron. But here, the last person on the line is the one who matters. The whole genealogy is upside down and inverted.

Because there's something about the last one which overwhelms the entire list. which puts all of the entire list and makes them virtually unimportant.

And it's because, and in the very next story, Matthew's going to talk a little bit more about it. Jesus, in a sense, in this human sense, isn't fathered.

So yes, the text does tell us that Jesus is human. But it tells us that this is an invasion by God. That there's a miracle by God that takes place in the womb of Mary.

And that's really important. It tells us something really important, two really important things about the gospel. And another thing about how once the gospel comes to us, it changes how we live.

[29 : 11] You see, it tells us that the gospel, the good news, is all about God's power doing something. Not ours. That every time we receive the gospel, we're receiving power from God.

And it's a miracle that makes us a Christian. I am a Christian because of a miracle. If you were here and you were a follower of Jesus, you are, God worked a miracle in your life.

The Christian faith is not like becoming an expert in meditation. And after decades and decades of meditation, you're able to meditate in a really perfect way. And you might be able to be proud about that.

And it's not like learning how to be a master of yoga. And after years and years of practice, you can do all of these yoga things. Or you can master your breathing. Or you're able to do, or you could be a gazillionaire if you have a secular saint.

Or that you're some type of unbelievable scholar with three PhDs. And after years and years of studying, there's a reason to be proud about that. But there's never anything to be proud about about being a Christian. Because it's about receiving something that only God can do.

[30 : 16] And when God does it, it's a miracle. And that's why the worst person in the world can become a follower of Jesus. The weakest person.

The most messed up person. And it's also why the most powerful person, the best meditator, the best poet, the best scholar. For only God can do it.

And every conversion is a miracle. When Jesus comes in, the Holy Spirit comes in, and we are reborn and made Christ's own forever.

It's a miracle. That's what the gospel is. And it also tells us something really, really important about how it is that we are to live.

It's that, remember I said the gospel tells us to be concerned about the real and the true. And it does tell us to be concerned about the real and the true. But it also constantly reminds us that God does miracles and that prayer works.

[31 : 17] The gospel keeps reminding us of that. It's as it forms us. It isn't that the most realistic person in the world never prays. No. The way the universe really exists is the most realistic people get on their knees and pray.

We get on our knees and pray. Just to sort of start to wrap it up, I wish I could tell you that this story had a happy ending.

And to my, it didn't have a happy ending when I had a conversation with this person. But a couple of years ago, I was in a Starbucks. And I'm there working. I have my Bible open. And a guy is beside me. And he sees me keeping going back.

I was working on my sermon or a talk or something. And he keeps seeing me read the Bible. And he finally says to me, you're reading the Bible, right? And I said, yes. He said, we have a bit of a conversation. And he says, you know, several years ago, I was having a really, really, really, really, really bad time in my life.

And I came across a Bible. And I thought, you know, I've heard people say that this is God's word. And I started to read the Bible. And as I read the Bible, I was saying, God, I'm really in a really hard space.

[32 : 23] I really need to know whether you might exist. I really need your help. And so I'm reading this Bible. I'd like to understand it. I'd like to understand you. And I spent several months reading the Bible and calling out to God.

And he never answered my prayer. So I gave up. And I looked at him and said, you know, this is why you need to pray for me, folks.

Because I'm not smart enough to start to think these things myself. I said to him, well, I think God did answer your prayer. And he said, no, I can guarantee you he did not answer my prayer. And I can tell you, I guarantee you he did.

I'm here right now to speak to you. I can help you to understand the Bible. And I can tell you about who Jesus is. And he looked at me and said, yeah, but that's not how I wanted God to answer my prayer.

And then the conversation ended up, rather than, I did it, I just popped into my head that that's what I should tell him. And all I said was, you know, when you call out to God in prayer, it doesn't necessarily mean he's going to answer on your timetable.

[33 : 33] But he'll answer. And it ended up being a conversation stopper. I don't know. Maybe later on he talked to somebody and he's a Christian. I have no idea. But it didn't lead any farther than that. But here's the thing, that insight that I had to tell him that particular thing, that's what's going on here in this text as well.

Did you notice it? Look at verse 17 or verse 16 again. And Jacob, the father of Joseph and the husband of Mary, of whom Jesus was born, who is called Christ. And if you go back up to verse 1, it

Because God keeps his word. And if you're here today and you haven't given your life to Jesus, you know, God's done something. He will do a miracle in your life if you call out to Jesus and ask him to be your savior and your Lord.

It's not about your ability to accomplish. It's about you receiving and then the gospel working at slow but steady and sure work in you that will lead you to glory.

Please stand. Let's bow our heads in prayer. Father, we ask that you give us a passion to read your word.

[39 : 24] And Father, give us a passion that even if it doesn't seem at first that there's much going on in your word, for us a confidence that there really is something, Father, in your word. We thank you, Father, that you might nourish us for a season in Philipians or for a season in Ephesians or in John until you fed us enough from that part of your word that we can be fed by other parts of your word.

But Father, we thank you so much that you caused your word to be written. We thank you that you keep your word. We thank you that you're real. We thank you, Father, that you hear our prayers. We thank you, Father, even though sometimes we don't know why you've said no.

Father, we thank you that when we get to heaven, we'll be so glad of those times you said no. And we thank you of all of those times, Father, that you have waited maybe days, weeks, maybe decades before you've answered the prayer.

And we don't even realize it, Father, but you have answered our prayers in surprising ways. Father, help us to be people of prayer. People, make us disciples of Jesus who are gripped by the gospel, learning to live for your glory.

This we ask in Jesus' name. Amen.