

# The Pagan Woman and Jesus

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Preacher: Rev. George Sinclair

[ 0 : 0 0 ]     Father, we are both very good at flattering ourselves too much to detect or hate our own sin, and we're also very good at not seeing it. And we're also very good, Father, at sometimes we just really look down our nose at others, and sometimes we beat ourselves up.

And, Father, we're not as balanced and as whole as we think we are. We fool ourselves. We thank you, Father, that we can come to be in your presence this morning.

We come, Father, as maybe seekers, some maybe as skeptics, most of us as redeemed sinners. But, Father, we are so glad we can come into your presence this morning to receive from you and receive grace from you.

And we ask that the Holy Spirit would fall with might and power and deep conviction as we think about Jesus and who he is and what he has said and what he has done for us.

And we ask this in the name of Jesus, your Son and our Savior. Amen. Amen. Please be seated. Some, because I'm ancient of days, at least 30 years ago, when I was still in the Anglican Church of Canada, there was an official publication of the Anglican Church of Canada that went to all, I think it, I'm not sure if it went to only clergy or it went to everybody, but it was a very official publication.

[ 1 : 1 9 ]     And one of the writer of this one article in the publication was the secretary or the assistant to the primate, so very high up and influential.

And he wrote an article about this particular story, the first one which we just read. And the story was entitled The Conversion of Jesus. And the point of the story was that Jesus had suffered under the racism and misogyny that was typical of men of his day, and that this was a very important story in the Bible because it revealed a time when Jesus is confronted by the other and is convicted of his sin.

And it's an important turning point in his life that he now begins to be less racist and less misogynistic. When this was written about 30, at least 30 years ago, when I was still in the Anglican Church of Canada, it didn't create any type of stir amongst the clergy.

Ideas like that had been very common for quite a while. Some of you who follow progressive Christian blogs and tweets and Instagram posts are probably aware that over the last couple of years, this idea has emerged amongst progressive Christianity, that this is a story which is significant because it shows the racism and misogyny of Jesus.

And once again, that it's a type of a conversion moment for Jesus, that he would now look at things from the eye from a different point of view. So is this true?

[ 2 : 4 6 ]     I mean, at least, I don't know how many of you were paying attention. We're going to look at the text again. But it is, at first glance at least, a troubling story, I think, for most Canadian Christians.

Probably not the story they'd pick to share with their co-workers, that we would pick to share with our co-workers for the first time at looking at the Bible. But let's walk towards it.

So it would be very helpful if you get out your own Bibles and turn to Mark chapter 7, verses 24 to 37. It's really two stories. We're going to spend the bulk of our time on the first story.

The second story is weird, right? You know, the spinning and all that type of stuff. But we're going to spend most of our time on the first one. And it's worth spending our time on. And just to sort of give it a bit of a context, what's just happened before this, because we are preaching through the book, what's just happened before this is Jesus has had a conflict with the, I guess, the cultural gatekeepers, the religious gatekeepers, the intellectual gatekeepers, the elite, the one that, in a sense, tried to help the whole society, the Jewish society, to understand themselves and how they're to live.

And he's had a conflict with them over uncleanness or cleanness. And it's really a conflict about what allows you to connect to God and what disconnects you from God, what allows you to approach God and what keeps you far from God.

[ 4 : 11 ] And the heart of the story, which has just gone on before this, is that they tended to think of things in terms of the barriers were racial, they were cultural, they were linguistic differences, and there were also differences about how you ate and other types of rituals.

So, in other words, their emphasis was on externals. And Jesus confronts them. And at the heart of his message is that, in fact, what keeps you far from God, what, in a sense, yeah, what keeps you far from God is something that emerges from within your own heart.

That it's out of your heart that pride and envy and sexual sin and coveting and greed, it emerges from within. And that's what keeps you separate from God. And so that's what's just happened.

And now the story of Mark continues with chapter 7, verse 24. And from there, he arose and went away to the region of Tyre and Sidon.

And he entered a house and did not want anyone to know, yet he could not be hidden. But immediately a woman, whose little daughter had an unclean spirit, heard of him and came and fell down at his feet.

[ 5 : 22 ] Now the woman was a pagan, a Syrophoenician by birth. And she begged Jesus to cast the demon out of her daughter. It's a very good request, right? Cast the demon out of my daughter.

And he said to her, these are stinging words to the modern Canadian ear. Let's just be honest. Let the children be fed first, for it is not right to take the children's bread and throw it to the dogs.

Now that's a hard saying for a lot of us today. Just as a bit of an aside, one of the commentaries that I consult in preparation of my sermons was written about 150 years ago.

And I consult it every week. And so I'm looking forward to reading it to see how he's going to address this issue. He never mentions this at all. Not at all. I think it's partially because for those of you who read old things, especially things from the 19th century and earlier, it was very common for people to use very, what we would now call abusive and insulting language.

It's just how they talked, right? And so he doesn't even talk about this. He gets to the other stuff, the fact that there was a demon and the deliverance and all that. But for us, it's a hard text. And it's not made actually easier by what happens.

[ 6 : 38 ] Look at what happens in verse 28. But she answered him, Yes, Lord, yet even the dogs under the table eat the children's crumbs. And he said to her, For this statement you may go your way.

The demon has left your daughter. And she went home and found the girl lying in the bed. And the demon gone. And we're going to pause and sort of camp on this a little bit for a while.

Now, one well-meaning solution that's often suggested by Christians defending the text. And the defense is sort of half right, but only half right. So it's in the right direction, but it's not quite phrased the right way.

But it's well-meaning. And the well-meaning part of it is, Well, look, at the end of the day, he delivered the demon from her daughter. So the stuff that goes before doesn't really matter, because what really matters is how the story ends, which is that, you know, he sort of says, Well done to the woman, and the demon goes away.

So that's what really matters. And that's, the ending of the story really is important, but not without doing some other thinking first, because here's how I think the average Canadian would respond.

[ 7 : 43 ]     The average Canadian would respond, No, no, no, no, no, no, no, no, time out. That's exactly how abusers treat people. Isn't it? Like, abusers just dump on people and call them names and just really go after them.

And what they really want is they want the abused person to agree with them. And then when the abused person agrees with them, then with a smirk, they let them have what they want, because they've won the battle, and they're helping the abused person to be even more abused.

They're maintaining abuse. Like, isn't that, that's, that's how abusers work. And now she's entering into his abuse, acknowledging his abuse, submitting to his abuse, and says, Oh, yeah, yeah, like he lets her go.

So that actually doesn't seem to help the problem at all. So, so the first thing we have to do is, that's a good response, by the way. We can't dismiss good response. We can't really dismiss, it's a very, it's a good observation, if that's all that we know, and we need to think about it.

So here's the first thing. Part of the problem we have reading the text is, we have a particular imagination about what's going on. And so the imaginative problem would be that if you were to come to, to see me at a family gathering, and every time I saw one of my sons, I went, Whoa, strong, good looking, smart.

[ 9 : 07 ]     And for my daughters, it's, you know, your dogs. And if you saw me treating my kids that way, my sons one way, and my daughters another way, you'd all, you'd call me on it.

If you didn't call me on it, I'm giving you permission to call me on it, like you should. That would be terrible. And that's sort of on one hand, what we see going on here would be the same thing as if I had, you know, if I meet people throughout the day that are all like me, and I'm very, very friendly to them.

And I'm, I'm, I'm, you know, using very, you know, positive language to them. And I meet people who aren't like me, and I use very insulting language to them. Then you'd want to call me on that. That's very, very clearly prejudice that I might not be aware of it, but it's very clearly prejudice.

And that's sort of what we hear when we see the text. We, we, we see this and, yeah, that's, that's how we see it.

And, actually, I, I, I missed something that's sort of important that I want to go back to. You know, the story about the abuser and the abused, and also this other language about, you know, the imagination, the way we work.

[ 10 : 13 ]     One of the reasons this is a very important story to us is it touches at a very, very deep fear that Canadian Christians have, and Canadians who aren't Christians definitely have.

It's a human fear. And it touches on a human fear that God will ultimately hurt us and demean us, that God is a threat. So, whether, whether you follow the, you know, Jordan Peterson is from a long line of scholars that looks at the stories in the book of Genesis, as, as, you know, Freud did this as well, that, that they're profound, Jung did this as well, they're profound insights into the human psyche, the stories.

Or, or whether you would be like me and say, well, they're also, they are profound insights into the human psyche, but they also happened. But regardless of which approach you take, Genesis chapter three is this very, very profound story after God has made everything good.

And, uh, Adam and Eve choose to make themselves God, choose their word over God's word, and, um, and, and choose to defy God in the process of choosing their word over God's, and choose to defy God in the process of wanting to show that they're at least as equal, but probably is better.

And the result is what we Christians call the fall. And, and you know that what happens is that after this, God is going to do his customary thing where he's going to walk with the Adam and Eve in the garden of the cool of the day, just to enjoy conversation with them.

[ 11 : 43 ] But he comes and they're not there because they're hiding. They're hiding because they're afraid of God. And they, their solution is even when they are forced to come out for God is that they try to cover themselves.

They continue to hide. And this very ancient story shows that we do have this very, very deep fear. We have a fear that if we get too close to God, if we get too close to Christ, he's going to hurt us.

He's going to demean us. He's going to make us, he's going to belittle us. He's going to make us less. And it's a very, very deep fear. And it comes out really and fully in types of the imagination that we have around this particular text.

But let's have a different type of imagination when we look at the text for a second. And this is an imagination that actually follows the text. It's not imposed on the text. Mark opens a door for us to imagine a very, very different thing.

But before that, I'm going to have to share a story with you of something that happened quite a few years ago, and I was still part of the Anglican Church of Canada. And it was very common for the clergy to dismiss people like me as fundamentalists.

[ 12 : 47 ] They would do it right while I was in the room. And they would make fun of fundamentalists. They would see fundamentalists as the source of all their problems. And one day, for one of the people who used this language all of the time, I was having coffee with them, or at some gathering it was just me and him.

We'll call him, you know, Bob, because all guys in my stories are Bob. And I said to Bob, because he was going on a little bit about fundamentalists, and I said to Bob, by the way, you know, that's a pejorative term. That's an insulting term, a prejudiced term against people like me.

And it was one of those moments, it was long enough ago that phones, there was a time that phones didn't have cameras. For you younger folks, hard to believe. But there was a time when, first of all, there weren't phones that you carry around in your pocket.

But if you did, they didn't have cameras. Anyway, I wish I'd had a, one of those times would have been great to photograph it. I think he actually, if I remember correctly, he actually had glasses. And I said that to him, you know, that it's actually quite insulting to be referred to that.

People like me, you know, who believe the Bible, who believe that Jesus actually rose from the dead, believe in the virgin birth, believe in miracles, and, you know, all that fundamentalist stuff, right?

[ 13 : 53 ] And he actually took off his glasses and looked at me in complete and utter surprise and said, it's not prejudiced or insulting to say that. And I said, it is. He said, every single person I know uses language like that.

Now, here's the thing. He was an impeccable part of the Toronto elite in terms of his education and formation. He'd gone to University of Toronto for his first degree.

He'd gone to Trinity College, to sort of the elite seminary in Anglicanism. And he very, very definitely traveled in those high elite circles. And part of it, of course, it was just the complete shock because, you see, people who are like him, who are liberals, cannot, by definition, be prejudiced.

By definition, I can't be prejudiced. So he's not being prejudiced. He's not putting me down. He's not calling me names because my sort of people don't talk like this.

And I say this as a bit of a, to give me some mercy because I might offend some of you here and I might offend some of you here. What's a better way to imagine this story?

[ 15 : 09 ] And I'm going to show you why it's a better way in a moment with the text. There was recently a little bit of a protest in Ottawa. Do some of you remember it? In fact, for those of you watching online, you might not realize, but for the first weekend of the truckers, the Freedom Convoy, throughout the entire, throughout the latter part of the service, you could hear the horns honking.

So that's where we are. Okay? And, um, now, the truckers had, uh, a signs up that had three words and the first word rhymed with truck but began with F.

Um, and you, you know what the word is. And, uh, and there were other types of signs, uh, that they would display. They, they weren't innocent.

This isn't a story between people who are completely innocent and people who are completely guilty. But on the other hand, even before they arrived, we were told that they were racist, fascist, misogynist, anti-gay.

They were deplorables. They were coming here to occupy and to take over the city. This was said by the political elite of our country.

[ 16 : 29 ] It was said consistently by all of the elite and just mainstream legacy media of this country. It has continued to be said by the mayor and the media of this, of this, of this country.

In fact, actually, it's very interesting. One of the, the columnists, because I, I read the citizen every day. I mean, the six days a week. And one of the, the columnists who was very, very, very filled with all of this language, consistently used freedom in quote marks and all that.

Her, her last column was actually on the importance of kindness. I'm not making this up. Her whole column was on the importance of kindness. Now, I would bet, especially if, if this, you're a, if you're a citizen reporter and you're here, I'm really glad you're here.

And I'll, gladly have a coffee with you, if not after the service. I'll, I'll take you out for lunch and you, you can push back at me. That's fine. But I, I get, I'm guessing that everybody, like this columnist, I'm guessing everybody in the citizen was like my friend Bobby.

And they would just say, we're not being prejudiced or divisive. Like, everybody we know talks like this. And we're good card-carrying liberals, so by definition, we're not prejudiced.

[ 17 : 48 ] Like, they'd probably be puzzled. Especially as evidenced by the columnist after three weeks of name-calling, saying that she's a huge believer in kindness and bridge-building.

I'm not making it up. So it's unconscious. Now, okay, whoa, whoa, whoa, whoa. All of a sudden here, this story's going to take on a bit of a different spin. You see, because imagine, and it's actually not that hard to imagine, that Jesus socially was part of the main group that was behind the Freedom Convoy.

He was lower working class. That he'd probably have been among them. Not with the FU, but he'd be among them.

So imagine Jesus was a part of the Trucker Convoy. And for those of you watching this who weren't from Ottawa, you might not get this city analogy. But he decides to go and spend two days in the Glebe at an Airbnb.

He leaves the Trucker Convoy and walks down and stays in the Glebe for a couple of days, two days. And in his first day of staying in the Glebe, a well-off woman from the Glebe with a rainbow flag, her green party button, and a little button telling us her pronouns, another appropriate dress for somebody who lives in the Glebe.

[ 19 : 19 ] Nothing wrong with any of those things per se. And she comes to speak to Jesus because she wants something for him. How does that conversation go? Now we're getting into what's actually happening in this story.

Now why am I putting Jesus with the weak people and why am I putting the woman as a Glebe person? Well, it's because of the text, not because I'm trying to make a political point, which I'm not.

Although obviously there are some political consequences of what I've said, but I don't want this to be... Listen to what goes on in the text again, verse 24. And from there he arose and went away to the region of Tyre and Sidon.

Now the big mistake that all of the people talking about this, they talk as if somehow the Jewish people are powerful. If you had gone back in time to the Romans, the people reading Marx that the Jewish people were powerful, they would have laughed at you.

Jewish people were excluded from everything. If you wanted to advance primarily in the Roman world, you had to be a pagan. Like guilds were set up around the worship of gods, like cultural celebrations to be part of the Roman legion.

[ 20 : 34 ] It all involves being willing to be a pagan, to worship many gods. And the Romans were very, very good. Whenever they went into a region and conquered an area like Tyre, and I don't know if particularly they did this, but they go into an area like Tyre and Sidon, they look at the range of gods and goddesses that the people of Tyre and Sidon have, and the ones that basically look very similar to the Roman gods, they just rename them.

They say, no, no, no, this god and this god, they're the same god. And if the people in Tyre and Sidon have some gods and goddesses that the Romans don't have, they just adopt them. Because if you believe that there's lots of gods and goddesses, it's no big deal if you discover another one.

And everything in civil life revolves around, if you want to advance in the guilds and politics and anything, you fundamentally have to accept the pagan worldview and live like a pagan. The Jewish people were oppressed, powerless people.

They weren't the, they were more like the truckers and not like the people who live in the glee. But there's nothing wrong with living in the glee. Like, if you're important in the government and you can afford money, praise God.

Nothing wrong with that. And you know, the other thing is is that the people of Tyre and Sidon were the ancient enemies of the Jews.

[ 21 : 52 ] They were. So a Jewish man goes into an area that are the ancient enemies of the Jews and a native of that land comes to ask him for some help.

I could have started with this analogy, but if I did that, then Canadians could just get left off the hook. It would be like Jesus going to spend some time in the Gaza Strip. How would that conversation go if somebody from Hamas wanted to have a conversation with Jesus?

Wanted some help. How would that conversation go? So she comes and she falls at her knees and she wants her help from Jesus.

By the way, that's a very long journey for a native pagan, which maybe in heaven we'll discover, we'll meet this woman and we'll get a bit of her story as to what led to this very long journey, even if it was maybe just walking three houses down.

But we all know that it would be as if there was a church in a Muslim neighborhood and even if the Muslim house was only two doors away, the journey from the house to the church would be a very long journey.

[ 23 : 13 ] And in many ways a very significant journey. And so she makes this significant journey and she comes and she asks this Jewish man to heal her daughter. And Jesus says, now by using the language of the truckers and the citizen and by using Hamas and Jewish people, you understand that name calling goes two ways.

That's what's usually forgotten when this story is interpreted. because they use the imagination of me with my sons and my daughters and not the story which is being told here.

Those of you who know the Bible very well, Jezebel, the archetype of the wicked queen, she's the daughter of the king of Tyre. And so Jesus says, let the children be fed first, for it is not right to take the children's bread and throw it to the dogs.

Now in English, here's one of these cases where knowing the original language is actually very, very helpful to understand the story because in a sense what Jesus does, he does take some of the language that is used by Jewish people to look down their noses at the time of people like this particular woman, but he actually transforms the language, he uses something which is similar but very different, and he uses a story which believe it or not opens a door to the woman without in a sense him giving up any ground.

The fact of the matter is, is that as Jesus says in John, salvation is from the Jews. I mean, my forebears stripped themselves naked, painted themselves blue, called them on their own gods as they fought the Romans.

[ 24 : 55 ] Those are my heritage. I mean, wait, that wasn't my parents, I mean, way, way back, right? Centuries. And so what Jesus does here, so it is true that the children are to be fed for, I mean, Jesus comes from the Jews, it is the Jewish people who are important in understanding, defining, rejecting, all of that all comes within the Old Testament, it's very important.

But then the language that he uses about this thing about the children and the dogs, he uses a different word for dog, he doesn't use the normal word, which is a wild dog, he uses the word for a pet.

A household pet. Now that things are about to open up, hopefully some of you can come to our house at some point in time, and if you've never been to our house, we happen to back on to some green belt, and at different times there's coyotes in the green belt, right behind our house.

At night sometimes you can hear them howling. If our neighbors found out that we were throwing food over the fence to feed the coyotes, they'd be very mad at us, and they should be.

We'd be mad if we found out that our neighbors were feeding the coyotes. But you all know how important Rocky was to our household. And we fed Rocky all the time.

[ 26 : 13 ] I mean, many of you who've had dogs, you understand at a very deep level how the death of a dog is an important change in your whole household. world. And Jesus doesn't use the language of feeding the coyotes.

He uses the language of feeding Rocky, who would, by the way, sit under the table waiting for something to fall, as well as our other dogs.

people. And one of the things which is very unique about this story is that she's the first person in the entire gospel of Mark to understand a saying of Jesus.

The first person. She doesn't answer Jesus from outside of his saying, his parable, above it, critiquing it. She enters into the door which he opens up and answers from within it.

And she answers from within it by saying in verse 28, yes, Lord, even the dogs under the table eat the children's crumbs. And what she's saying is, and for some of you who are very narcissistic and proud, and we all know who we are, it's hard for us to understand that there's some people who come to the Christian faith and they really have such a, they've been so rejected, so abused, so neglected, so overlooked, so beat up, that they really never, it's hard for them, if God, if God, if Jesus would just accept them, and you know, even if you don't accept me as your child, but if you just sort of let me in, Jesus, just off on the side, you know, Jesus, I'm not worthy of it, you know, nobody accepts me, nobody, you know, my parents don't like me, I've always been overlooked, I'm not very important, I'm not very good, I'm not very skilled, I'm not very powerful, I'm not very good looking, and all of the things, and with all of their knots, they would just be really, really happy if Jesus would just let them slip in and quietly be at a corner, and for some of us it's very hard to imagine that that's how somebody would think, but there are people who think and this story is for them, and really what this woman is saying,

[ 28 : 25 ] Jesus, I just want to be part of your household, even if it's only as a pet, take me in your household, even if I'm just your pet, and that would be good enough for me.

You see, in many ways this story is equivalent to the story of the prodigal son in the gospel of Luke, and for those of you who know the Bible, you'll know the story, but very simply the son who wants the father dead gets half of his inheritance, blows it all in a foreign land, and he's reduced to complete poverty, and one day while he's feeding the pigs, and he wishes he could eat the food that the pigs are eating, and he comes and he says to himself, this is nuts, my life sucks, maybe I can go back to my dad, because my dad's slaves eat better than I'm eating right now, and I don't deserve to be part of the family, I don't deserve to be a son anymore, but maybe he'd accept me as a slave.

And the story goes, he comes back and the father welcomes him as way more than a slave. And the point of this story is that Jesus welcomes the woman as way more than a dad.

And it's pointing to this profound change which is going to happen as a result of the life and death and resurrection of Jesus. That when Jesus dies on the cross at the end of Mark, the first person to recognize that he is God dying is the Roman soldier who crucifies Jesus.

That the death of Jesus on the cross is for pagans and Jews and gays and straights and suburbans and downtown people and rich and poor and the fit and the unfit, the popular and the unpopular.

[ 30 : 23 ] It's for people in China and Korea and Russia and Ukraine and Rwanda and Uganda and Argentina and Colombia and New York City, Manhattan and the annex in Toronto.

Jesus died for all. He is the king who creates a kingdom by his death upon the cross and the good news is that the king who will make you right with almighty God is inviting you to be part of his kingdom and what is needed is repentance and what is needed is faith.

Now note, if you could put up the first point, Jesus doesn't in a sense meet her halfway. You see, here's the thing. Since Jesus is the savior, he is the Lord and he is the true God incarnate, there is no middle ground between him and any other way to God.

There is no middle way between him and any other way to God. If that sounds, just a minute, I mean, there isn't a cure for COVID-19 yet.

There are things which mitigate symptoms. But if there was a cure, next month there's a cure for it. You get this, you will never transmit it, and you will never get it.



[ 31 : 54 ] it. You will never transmit it, you will never get it, and it covers all the variants. If there is a cure, and it's announced, and the scientific literature, the double-blind control studies with no seboes and placebos and all that, and it all proves that this works with 100% effectiveness.

If anybody said, no, no, no, no, no, you've got to need, I have this, my own little home solution of mixing honey and baking soda and alfalfa sprouts and wheat germ, and you need to mix these two.

You say, are you foolish? Like, you don't mix the two. There's no middle ground. No matter how much you think your organic wheat germ will help, there's no middle ground, and that's what's shown in the story.

Now, one of the things, there's two things, and I had other points. I think I'm going to just end the sermon with these other two points, and I'll put on the online what I was going to say about some of the next story, but just looking at the time, I want to end with these two points.

The first challenge in this text is there's a challenge for us as Christians to be so gripped by this story in the gospel, that when we see people who really differ from us, we fight the urge to call them names, and we call out to God and say, Lord, how could I have a conversation with this person?

[ 33 : 29 ] How could I reach out a hand of welcome and conversation with this person? In our flesh, we want to zing them and get them and win politically and culturally.

And by the way, I'm not saying that there aren't, I mean, there aren't Christians who might be called to work in the area of being a pundit and involved in cultural things. That's fine. That's your own vocation, but for the average Christian, a story like this challenges us that if we meet somebody who obviously has a worldview and a culture that's very opposed to ours and in fact actually would really look down their noses at us and actually even think that we're evil, the challenge of this story is not to get mad and not to want to punish them, not to want to get power so that we can put them in their place.

No. The challenge of this story is how can I have a conversation with this person that could lead them to Jesus? Like, Lord, help me. Help me to fight my flesh. Help me to fight my desire to make political and cultural points and engage in conversation.

And the second takeaway from this story, and you'll all have your own, is that from the point of view of Jesus' disciples and the Jewish people, this woman was a completely, like, you don't even pray for people like her because she will never have anything to do with the Messiah.

Wrong. And one of the challenges for this is it's not only important to figure out how we have conversations with people who are very different than us, but it's also really important that we pray for unlikely people.

[ 35 : 11 ] In fact, I haven't written a blog for a while. The blog that will come out tomorrow is a bit more on this. But we need to fight the tendency to think, no, no, I can't pray for this person to become a Christian because they'll never become a Christian.

You don't know that. In fact, I bet if you knew the stories of some of the people in here, you'd say, well, there's no way somebody like you would ever become, like, what are you doing here? I remember I'm on the Council of the Gospel Coalition Canada, and I'm part of the founding council members, and they went through the biography of all the different people, and they all went to, like John MacArthur's school and this school and that, and then they came to me, and I happened to be alphabetically the last, and the guy, he's a really wonderful guy, John Mahaffey, looked at me and smiled.

He said, George, because we all had a sheaf of our biographies, one of the people in here is not like the others, referring to me.

We need to fight that. We need to pray for the unlikely people. Like, pray for your children, pray for your family, pray for your neighbors, pray for your loved ones, pray for the people who are like you, pray for them that they come to a saving faith in Jesus, but make sure you look and say, Lord, who do I know that I think there is never in a hundred gazillion years that they would ever become a Christian, and then pray for them, and pray for more than them.

Pray for the unlikely. Waste your prayers on them, in quotes. Let's stand. Bow our heads in prayer.

[ 36 : 50 ] Father, we have to confess before you that often we look at your word and it makes us afraid, that often we look at your word and we judge it. And Father, we're not even aware often that we're afraid of your word or that we judge your word.

It's just sort of an unconscious thing. Father, we confess before you that we're more fallen than we realize, and we're more Canadian than we realize. And Father, we ask that the Holy Spirit would help to bring your word and your gospel home to us at a very, very deep level.

And we ask, Father, that you put in our hearts to pray for people that we think would never become Christians, that they would become Christians, as well as pray for others that we think there's some hope for, whether we would pray for them, for their conversion.

And Father, we know that some of us, as part of our jobs and our vocations, have to deal with some of the cultural and political wars. And Father, we bless them. We ask that you grant them great wisdom and discernment as to how to do those things, because there are some cultural matters that they matter greatly.

And Father, we don't want to dismiss them. And we ask your blessing upon them if they're in politics or certain areas of the media or other culture-forming groups. We ask that you help them to engage in those things wisely and well.

[ 38 : 03 ] But Father, for us as Christians, for most of us as Christians, we ask, Lord, that you help us to put to death our flesh and our desire to pick fights and focus on political things.

And Father, we ask that you would grant us instead that we would be slow to speak, that we would be slow to anger, that we would be quick to listen. and that you grant us ears to know how we might say a word to a person that might be that little pebble, Father, that goes in their boot or goes in their shoe and ends up leading them to become a Christian.

Father, grant us that ability to not be afraid and not to be angry and to say that one little word that you then use to bring them to Christ.

Christ. And we ask all these things in the name of Jesus, your son and our savior and all God's people said, amen.