

# My Father Was A Wandering Aramean

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[ 0 : 0 0 ] Hey Table Church, my name is Anthony Parrott and I'm one of the pastors on staff here and it's my privilege and honor to be able to share the Word of God with you this morning and admittedly it's not only the Word of God I'll be sharing. Today I wanted to take the opportunity to share my life story, my testimony, my journey with Jesus however you want to put it. I have the gift or the privilege or the responsibility I guess of having a kind of more unique life story and so one of the things I wanted to do in the first couple months that I was serving as your pastor was to share that with you just so we could know each other a little bit better. You could know me a little bit better and kind of where I'm coming from but I'm kind of addicted to teaching the Bible as well so I do want us to actually open up our Bibles and take a look at something because I think it relates to all of our stories no matter what that story looks like where you're at in it today. So if you have a Bible open it up turn it on whatever makes sense open up a new window in Chrome and join me in the book of Deuteronomy chapter 26. Deuteronomy chapter 26 it's the fifth book of the Bible and towards the end of that book chapter 26. Let me give you just a little bit of background very very big picture. God created the world starting the story all the way back then. God created the world and his people his creation rebelled against him and so immediately God's response was to lean into creation and start a rescue plan and that rescue plan kind of bumped along for a little while until we get to the book of Exodus and Moses and Egypt and the Israelites being called out of Egypt so that they could go to the promised land and they wandered around the desert for 40 years. If you've seen the Ten Commandments Easter special on ABC you've seen all of those kinds of stories. Where we're at Deuteronomy chapter 26 is the Israelites about to enter into the promised land and Moses their leader who's led them for 40 years about to die telling them what they need to do next as he is about to pass away and as that as they are about to enter into the land that God has promised their forefathers their fathers and now them. So that's where we're at. Deuteronomy 26 this is what it says.

It says when you have entered the land that your Lord your God is giving you as an inheritance and have taken possession of it and settled in it take some of the first fruits of all that you produce from the soil of the land the Lord your God has given you and put them in a basket and then go to the place the Lord your God will choose as a dwelling for his name and say to the priest in office at the time quote I declare today to the Lord your God that I have come to the land to the Lord that the Lord swore to our ancestors to give us. So just to summarize you get into the land you're going to be probably a farmer of some sort so the first thing that you're going to do when your crops begin to grow is you're going to pick those crops up you're going to put them in a basket and you're going to go to the place where the Lord decides to have his name dwell. In other words the temple the centralized location where worship happens and you make this declaration in front of the priest I am bringing my offering to God and the priest verse 4 shall take the basket from your hands and set it down in front of the altar of the Lord your God and then you shall declare before the Lord your God so what is about to be said is this face-to-face conversation you and the divine you the creator of the universe and this is what you are instructed to say my father was a wandering Aramean and he went down into Egypt with a few people and lived there became a great nation powerful and numerous but the Egyptians mistreated us and made us suffer subjecting us to harsh labor so then we cried out to the Lord the God of our ancestors and the Lord heard our voice and saw our misery our toil and oppression so the Lord brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm with great terror and with signs and wonders and he brought us to this place and gave us this land a land flowing with milk and honey and now I bring the first fruits of that soil that you Lord have given me and then you'll place the basket before the Lord your God and you'll bow down before him and then you and the

Levites or the priest and all the foreigners residing among you shall rejoice in all the good things the Lord your God has given to you in your household and when you have finished setting aside and now not just the first fruits but the tenth of ten percent of all the produce in the in the year you shall give it to the priest and to the foreigner to the fatherless and to the widow so that they may eat and be satisfied this is the word of the Lord everyone has a story every single one of us me on this side of the camera you on that side of the screen we all come today with stories stories that have positively affected and influenced us who have shaped us to become the people that we are today people who are creative and dynamic and who are shaping the world to look more and more like Jesus's kingdom but we also admit that our stories negatively influence us and so when we get angry or sad or our emotions shut down we're reliving moments in our story that happened that maybe we don't even remember maybe we don't want to bring up at the dinner table or thanksgiving or any day of the week but they happen to us what i love about scripture and what i love about this right here is that there's this moment where the Israelites have finally gotten the promised land the inheritance that's been promised to them for generation upon generation upon generation and they come face to face with god in the temple and they are to declare this interesting bizarre wrinkle in their story my father was a wandering aramean arameans were nomads they were desert dwellers and they were looked upon with not much respect because they went to and fro and never really settled down and this is the thing that you were meant to declare before god in his dwelling place you're meant to declare your story so here's my story my mother was a paranoid schizophrenic she had been married previously and had a couple children and eventually had a psychotic breakdown that led to her divorce and to her eventually becoming a ward of the state as someone who was mentally ill she eventually had an affair with a married man and out of that affair i was born i was born every day i was born my mom and tony and i lived in essentially the projects of elkhart indiana uh we were poor my mom could hold a job and that's where we lived i didn't know who my father was i didn't know about her previous marriage i lived with her until i was around six years old we were destitute We dealt with rodents and rats, and she was mentally ill. She refused medication most of the time, and I had to take care of myself in most ways.

[ 8 : 00 ] I remember learning how to make mac and cheese and hot dogs. One of the first things I remember is learning how to cook. My mom was abusive physically and emotionally.

She didn't know how to raise a child and be mentally sick at the same time. Who does? We lived there for a while, and eventually my biological mom, Toni, she decided that she wanted to become a nurse.

And in order to become a nurse, that she had to go to a nursing college in Cairo, Egypt. So she consulted with some people, heard about this thing called the Bering Strait Land Bridge, which apparently was a thing in ecological history, and decided that that would be our ticket to freedom. My grandmother had passed away and left Toni a chunk of money and a car. And so we packed up everything we had into this old Pontiac and drove from northern Indiana all the way through the northern states up through Highway 1 in Canada to Alaska.

With the point being that we could then eventually drive from Alaska to Russia and all the way down to Egypt. I don't know if you know anything about geography, but it doesn't work that way.

[ 9 : 22 ] Actually, you can't even drive all the way across Alaska. There's a chunk of highway on the eastern side, and then the wilderness, the wild, and then a few cities on the western side. And there's an ocean between us and Russia, Asia, all of that.

But that was my mom's plan. So we packed everything up and we drove. I served as a six-year-old navigator reading the map and getting us from northern Indiana to Alaska, which is, you know, pretty impressive for a six-year-old.

And we eventually, my mom, honest to God, she tried to drive the car on the Adidarod, that dog racing trail.

We got the car stuck, got towed out, and then eventually made it to this little port town in Seward, Alaska, on the southern border of the state.

And my mom had another kind of just mental episode where she put gasoline in an oil tank, and she put oil in a gas tank.

[ 10 : 23 ] And the gas station attendant, don't know who this person was, never found their name, but they observed six-year-old Anthony, my biological mom, this weird, bizarre situation with a car stuffed full of trash bags of all of our belongings and Tony putting the wrong stuff in the wrong

places.

And this gas station attendant ended up calling the city authorities. We drove away from the gas station, the car kind of putted to its death. And we enjoyed some hospitality from some sort of guardian angels of people who let us stay at their house for a while.

When we went back to get the car, the car was gone. And we called the authorities, police, city hall, ended up at the Seward, Alaska city hall. My mom was talking to some folks, and they were beginning to pull this story out of her of wanting to go to Egypt, of wanting to drive across this bridge that didn't exist.

And I remember, as a six-year-old, a woman coming in and asking to speak with me. So I paused and said goodbye to my mom and went with this woman and ended up in a car with my foster family.

And when was the last time I have ever seen Tony? I went from believing that that was going to be the rest of my life, that I was going to be on my way to Egypt, whatever that meant, living with my mom, Tony, from that to living in a trailer park with a foster family in Seward, Alaska.

[12:01] I, of course, was scared and confused and a really, really angry six-year-old. Because even though my mom was abusive and didn't know how to take care of me, she was still my mom.

She was still the only one of the few caretakers I'd known in my life. Changing into kind of the spiritual side of things, I went to Catholic kindergarten, first grade.

My mom, Tony, had pulled me out of first grade to take this epic road trip. And I just remember a few things about church, mass, Catholic school.

I remember one teacher kind of saying that yellow represented everything that was divine and godly. And to me, God was like this nebulous something that was all around and kind of intimidating.

And kind of scary and definitely not out for my good. How could God be out for my good? Look at what just happened to me. My foster family at the time, they didn't make their foster kids go to church.

[13:05] And I remember being given that option and me saying, absolutely not, as a six-year-old. I lived in Alaska for a couple months.

It was cold. I remember being Superman for Halloween and being too sick to go outside because I just did not do well with the cold.

But there was something else, too. I was put back into school, second grade at this point. And I couldn't do anything with PE. I couldn't really walk the hallways.

I would walk for a while. I would squat down and pant for my life. My fingertips would turn blue. I would lose the color out of my face. So I was taken up to Anchorage, Alaska, where they did some scans.

And they realized that I had a congenital heart defect, that I was born with multiple holes in my heart. And found out years later that they knew that when I was born.

[14:01] They had told my biological mom. But because of her schizophrenia, she had this fear of conspiracies about everything being out to get her. And so when the doctors told her that her son was sick, needed care, she refused that care for me.

So they figured that out, figured out that I had these holes in my heart. And they did some digging around and figured out that my biological mom, Tony, had a brother who lived in Indianapolis, home of Riley's Children's Hospital.

So they agreed to take me in. And I moved from Alaska to Indianapolis to live with my aunt and uncle and cousins, where I had heart surgery.

When they cracked open my chest and got in there, if you can imagine, like a six-year-old's heart or a six-year-old's fist, about the size of a six-year-old's heart.

And I was tiny, tiny kid, because my heart had not been functioning all this time as well as it should have been. They found a hole the size of a quarter and the other the size of a dime. A six-year-old's heart, which meant that blood would flow in, needing oxygen.

[15:10] And instead of going to the lungs, they would just basically fall into the next chamber without getting oxygenated. And honestly, I don't want to overstate. I don't want to say like I'm some miracle child or something like that.

But it was surprising that I had lasted as long as I had that severe of a heart defect. So I had heart surgery for a day and they stitched it up and put a patch over the holes.

And honestly, the heart stuff is some of the least interesting to me because, yeah, I'm fine. I don't have any restrictions or anything like that. I am amazingly blessed that I was able to live to that point and then to be able to recover.

And, you know, I'm no linebacker or anything now, but I'm physically doing quite okay. What was interesting, at least from kind of my Jesus story perspective, so I was baptized Catholic as an infant. I came to live with my uncle and handsome cousins and they were part of a relief system that was concerned about the salvation of my soul and what would happen if I were to die during the heart surgery.

[16:23] So they had me baptized again, this time as a Lutheran. And I was baptized, you know, not really knowing what was going on. From second and fourth grade, I went to Lutheran school.

And I'll say this for Lutheran school, I learned probably as much about the Bible then as I did in, like, undergrad and seminary because they just, like, had you memorize so much Bible stuff.

But I was a really pissed off kid. I had been taken away from my mom. I had been shipped across the country to live with some relatives who I, quite frankly, didn't understand why they hadn't gotten involved sooner.

And now I'd had my chest ripped open and been made kind of the spectacle of my second grade class. And I was just angry. And I didn't understand why I wasn't allowed to go back to see my mom.

I also have been told that my mom had been offered multiple times the ability to see me, but that she refused because that paranoia kicked in again. And I was angry.

[17:24] I think I would have called myself a Christian at the time, not exactly knowing what that meant. But in reality, I had no love for God and did not think that he loved me.

I kept journals from second grade on. That tells you anything about my personality. Journals that I still have. And there were pages ripped out. And I know what those pages ripped out said because they were just like every curse word I knew, which as a third grader, it wasn't tons, directed at God. Why would he do this? Why would he let this happen? Why would he let my mom be so sick? Why would he let me be so sick? Why am I not back with her?

I understandably had some psychological issues. Being raised by somebody who themselves was mentally ill. So I went through counseling.

I went through a lot of counselors because my issues were pretty interesting. I, at one point, believed I was the next John the Baptist. I was going to herald in the second coming of Christ.

[18:31] I wrote some pretty threatening things towards my cousin in my journal, which, you know, is sometimes just what kids do. But if you're a parent of a child and you bring in, like, a nephew, and that nephew is saying or writing threatening things, you probably would be scared for your kid too.

So my aunt and uncle, they oversaw and cared for me during my surgery and during my recovery over those next few years. But it was not their intention to adopt me.

And that has its own kind of scars and wounds and interesting questions. But as a parent now, I can understand their own kind of fear and trepidation about that. So I was put back into the foster system one more time.

But at this point, I'm 10. I have a history of psychological issues. I have an ongoing heart condition that will continue to need care. I had been raised by a mentally ill person.

I was not exactly, like, what you would long for if you were going to be adopting a child. I was colloquially known in the foster system as a throwaway kid because who would want to adopt or foster someone like me?

[19:47] And yet, there was this family called the Parrots, Devin Dale, and they had fostered upwards of 40 kids over their foster parent career. They had actually recently decided to be done.

But then they came across my case and thought, we have to take this kid in. And so after fourth grade, I moved from Indianapolis up to Goshen, Indiana, with the Parrots and my new family. It's funny because as a 10-year-old, I had been told that maybe there was still a chance I'd be reunited with my biological mother because of my variety of issues.

I would probably be, like, an only child or be an older sibling or something like that. That was not the case. When I moved in with the Parrots, there were five older kids there at the time.

I, the intention was never for me to be reunited with Toni, and for good reason. She was so mentally sick. And it was a very, very different experience than anything I'd had before.

[ 20 : 53 ] This was a family that was kind of a little bit wild and rambunctious, and there were seven of us. And it was very, very different. But something else that was very, very different was that this was a family that really loved Jesus.

And it was the first family and home where I felt this sense of love and belonging and connection that I was so hungry for as a child.

I went in and, you know, called my parents Deb and Dale because that's how I knew them. But within a couple weeks, I was saying I love you, Mom and Dad.

And I just know and feel that their love and affection for a throwaway kid like me was life-changing and life-altering.

And what Mom and Dad, Deb and Dale Parrott, did is this reflection of the kind of love that God has for his children and what he does when he adopts us into his family, what he does when he calls us.

[ 21 : 58 ] Brothers and sisters of Jesus, fellow heirs of the throne, that in Revelation it says that we will sit on the same throne that Jesus sits on, which is next, which is God's throne.

That's what adoption is. So I moved in with the parents when I was 10 and lived with him for a couple years. My dad, he worked on a newspaper press, the physical thing that prints the newspaper.

So every once in a while he would bring home these big rolls of newspaper, blank newspaper print. And one Christmas, Christmas of 99, I believe, they put me in the middle of the living room and they wrapped me up in this newspaper print.

And I remember this very clear thought of like, I've gone from one, pardon the language, crazy family to another crazy family. But they wrapped me up and they said, Anthony, we want you to be the gift to the family this year.

We want to adopt you. And so they ripped the newspaper off. And it was like this lifetime hallmark moment, which is kind of hard to believe actually happened. But it did. I was going to be adopted into the Parrott family.

[ 23 : 07 ] It was long and complicated because I was technically a ward of the state of Alaska, even though I only lived there for a couple months. But after a couple of years, I stood before a judge and my name was changed.

I was Anthony James Roan. And now I was declared a new person with a new birth certificate. I'm Anthony Paul Parrott. Deb and Dale Parrott are my parents.

And it's according to the law, they always have been. And that's what I love about the power of adoption is that stories are redeemed. Stories are changed. Stories are rewritten in a way that brings hope.

So I was 12 years old when I was adopted. Also when I was 12 years old, I had been now part of the Parrott family for a couple of years, a part of their church.

And the way that they talked about Jesus, the way that they talked about God, was unlike anything I've experienced before. God wasn't just like this nebulous, everything that was yellow thing in the sky.

[ 24 : 09 ] God wasn't just like this thing that you had to memorize and recite. Jesus was a person. Jesus had personal interest in me and my story and who I was and what I was going to become.

So I was kind of flirting with Jesus and a relationship with him for quite some time. And in a lot of ways, I feel like I'd been following and been interested in Jesus for a while.

But there's still one moment that I kind of remember clearly as a turning point. Being at a youth retreat in sixth grade and the song, Open the Eyes of My Heart came on, which if you've been part of the Christian tradition, it's an old classic corny Christian worship song.

But I remember the clear voice of the Holy Spirit saying to me, kneel down, kneel down. And so I knelt down and declared Jesus as my Lord and my friend and my Savior and was changed.

I remember not feeling quite so angry. I remember feeling not quite so abandoned by God and immediately took all that stuff I had learned about the Bible and began to teach a Bible study in sixth grade to my fellow middle school students and get involved in my youth group and teaching and just had this love for God's word and scripture begin to be birthed within me.

[ 25 : 37 ] A love that I carry through to this day. Around that time as well, I began to show interest in playing piano. I was part of the sixth grade choir and the sixth grade girls would always go to the piano during choir and play heart and soul.

Do, do, do, do, do, do, do, do, do, do. And I remember going home to our piano and wanting to learn how to play it. So my mom like showed me like the little bit that she knew about how to make a chord and apparently I had an ear for it and just kind of took off and began to write songs.

And my parents invested a whole bunch of money and time into some really, really good lessons with Dr. Matthew Hill who was taught at the Goshen College Conservatory.

And I think that Dr. Hill could have taken anybody off the street and taught them piano. He was, he was just really, really good. Something else I'm really grateful for. Skipping ahead.

I went to my denominational college, Bethel College. And there's a section of my story that, which I won't go into today, but I ended up being homeschooled and that homeschool curriculum came out of a independent fundamentalist King James Version only curriculum.

[ 26 : 49 ] Also flirted with some Pentecostal charismatics and spoke in tongues and cast demons out the whole nine yards. So when I got to Bethel, when I got to college, like I knew everything already.

So I told myself and anybody who would listen, I knew everything already. I was just getting a degree because that was what you had to do. I was blessed. And I feel like there's a different version of my story I could tell.

I am blessed by God of the number of mentors who have been incredibly patient and kind to a know-it-all asshole like me to set me inside and say like, yes, and have you considered?

And so after my freshman year, that was kind of my, had a very quick deconstruction phase because as you begin to pull a brick out of fundamentalism, it all kind of just falls apart.

So my deconstruction happened fast, but I was graced with really, really wise mentors, professors, teachers who gave me a faith worth believing in again, who gave me a faith that could withstand criticism, could withstand hard questions and doubts, and was able to be poked and prodded and punched and was okay with that.

[ 28 : 11 ] And I can't express the level of gratitude that I have for those professors and teachers that offered me a faith in Jesus that still had a few absolutes, a few concrete things to hold on to, but also gave me a lot of grace to ask questions, to poke and to prod and to pry at what is true, what is real, what is God really like, and to be in a safe place to ask those questions and be okay with not having instant answers.

In college, I met a woman named Emily, and I told part of the story in an earlier sermon where I had asked her out, and she told me no, and she said I needed some counseling, which was absolutely true, and I'm very, very glad for her saying that.

And so I went back into counseling after way too many years away and began to work on all of those things that had happened in my life and kept my friendship with Emily, and later that year, that late fall, we began to date and to fall in love and eventually get married.

I graduated in 2009, which was right during the Great Recession. Not a lot of churches were hiring pastors at that time. Another part of my story is always having this confidence that God had called me in the pastoral ministry, which is another story for another time.

We don't have all day here. So I and Emily. Emily was laid off from her job too, so we did some odd jobs. We worked housekeeping and sold books and Hallmark cards and did all sorts of things until we were called to Okoboji, Iowa, Northwest Iowa.

[ 30 : 02 ] We didn't have any prior connection, but I had some really fundamental, like theological issues with the denomination that church was a part of, and I remember talking to the person who ended up being my pastor and my boss at the time and him saying, look, we don't have the corner on truth.

And it was that kind of epistemological humility, that humility to know what you know and what you don't know and not know what you don't know that I deeply appreciated.

And that's part of what formed me during my 10 years in Northwest Iowa, this idea of continuing to look for truth, look for what is really true about God and his people and about Jesus and about the spirit, but also to be humble about what we know and what we don't know and what we don't know we don't know.

It's also there where I learned the importance of self-care. My pastor at that time had burned out in a prior part of his life in ministry and was committed to not having the same thing happen to his staff.

And so I was deeply formed by spiritual formational practices and finding God in contemplative and quiet and silent moments and recognizing my limits and knowing where at rest and Sabbath is.

[ 31 : 21 ] So I bring that. We were married for about seven years and then decided to have children. So a little over four years ago, we had Audrey, but over two years ago, we had Wesley, who I believe you might hear screaming right now.

And then my brother tragically died in a car accident. Say it as suddenly as that because that's as suddenly as it happened.

We got a call. You ever get a call from your mom at like 11 o'clock at night and you just know that it can't be good if your mom's calling at 11 o'clock at night. It's one of those calls. And yeah, my brother, who was also adopted and wrecked his truck and end up killing himself.

I don't think intentionally. Just he ended up dying. And I feel like I'm still swimming in the repercussions of that bit of tragedy he left behind, his wife and his two-year-old daughter.

And there is, I think in everybody's life, there are these kind of epics, these sections of like things that happened way back then and things that happened not so long ago and in the things that you're in right now.

[ 32 : 41 ] And the things that you're in right now, you don't even necessarily realize that you're in it until you're past it. That's kind of what I'm in right now is that thing that I'm not sure what it's going to look like on the other side.

And when it comes to grief and death, like there rarely is another side because when somebody has died and passed away and gone, they tend to stay that way, at least until the resurrection that we can hope for.

And so that's where I have been at for quite some time of thinking about the crappiness of death and the crappiness of a world that oftentimes seems unpredictable and scary and can set you back in ways that you didn't expect when you think everything was just going fine.

And yet, I have had this gift of faith where I have yet to lose my faith in Jesus.

Yet to lose my faith in God's goodness. And we're going to get talking about that next month as we get into the book of Job and the problem of pain and suffering and where is God when things hurt.

[ 33 : 55 ] So we'll talk about philosophy and the Bible and all of those kinds of things. But for me, personally, emotionally, all of that, I'm confident that, and this is what I preached on at my brother's funeral, God did not want this to happen.

This was not part of some grand plan. This was not part of some God's meticulous sovereignty that made sure that David turned, my brother turned the wheel at the right time to hit a curve to flip his truck.

that's not the God that we worship. It's not the God that we serve. It's not the God that loves you and made this world. We serve a much, much better God than that.

And we serve a God that suffers alongside us and with us and is even more grieved at my brother's death, at the loneliness of his wife and his daughter than I am.

And I believe that and I worship that God and I feel that this is why we need to tell our stories. This is why, back to Deuteronomy, this is why the Israelite walks into the temple and says, my father was a wandering Aramean.

[ 35 : 15 ] Because our stories have these painful parts. Our stories have these parts that we'd rather not remember, these winding, curving, treacherous roads and mountains and valleys and wildernesses that we'd rather set aside.

And I believe God in his goodness says, no, I actually want that part of your story. He didn't design that part of our story. He didn't set out to make our stories look like that.

But when we approach the divine, when we approach God, God says, I want that part too. I want you in all of you.

I want you in all of your messiness. I want you in all of your despair. I want you in all of your pain. I want you in all of your high points and your low points, your happiness and your joy and your grief and your sorrow.

God wants all of you. He wants all of us. He wants all of me. And so when we go bearing our basket of fruit to the presence of God in the temple, we don't have to fake it.

[ 36 : 18 ] We don't have to pretend. We don't have to act like everything has always been fine and everything always will be fine because it's not and God's not stupid. God says in Deuteronomy, when you come to my presence, say this, my father was a wandering Aramean.

My mother was a paranoid schizophrenic. I don't know about your mothers and your fathers and I don't know about all your stories, but I'm certain that there are painful parts, parts in the past, parts

in the present, painful parts that will be in the future.

And our God says, I want all of that. I want all of you, all of your pain, all of your sorrow, all of your joy. And so I invite you to know this God, this God that no matter what is with you and is for you and is on your side and is going to be working alongside you, conspiring with you to bring something good even out of the bad.

I want you to know that if you're in a place of hurt and heartache and pain today, God is on your side. If you are in a place of rebellion and of failure and of breaking every promise you've ever made, God is on your side.

If you're in a place of doubting and skepticism and cynicism and if you want to shut this whole thing down, God is on your side. If you are in a place where you are hungry and you're thirsty and you literally don't know if you're going to keep the lights on or if you can even keep the fridge on, much less the fridge full, God is on your side.

[ 38 : 07 ] If you're in a place where you're set, you're good, you're in a really, really good place right now, you are joyous, you are happy, you are celebrating, God is celebrating with you, God is on your side.

I want you to know that God loves you and God is pushing us and pulling us and moving us into new places of growth and grace and mercy to show us what love really is, to show us the meaning of loving our friends and of loving our enemies, of what it really means to notice all of our stories, not just the good parts, not just the bad parts, but all of our stories and bringing them into his presence and saying, my father was a wandering near me and my mother was a paranoid schizophrenic, my story is effed up, but God, do you love me anyway?

would you pray with me? Father, Son, and Spirit, we thank you that you are the God of stories, that you are the God who brings our story to completion and we don't even know what that completion looks like yet and yet we trust that you are pulling us forward into the future, that you are pulling us forward into hope, that you are pulling us forward into your kingdom, where your will is done perfectly, but until that day, God, we bring our stories to your feet, we bow down before you and we say, all of us belongs to you.

So God, for all of my friends who are listening and watching today, I pray that you would open up their eyes, open up their hearts, open up their senses to where you've always been, where you've been active and participating and always up to something good in their lives.

And God, would you invite, would your Holy Spirit invite us to join you in the good that you are up to, to recognize the good that you are doing and to join you in the good that you are up to. God, we pray these things for the glory of Jesus, the world might be reconciled to each other and to you.

[ 40 : 28 ] In Jesus' name, Amen.