

**Rasool Berry:** What's up y'all. It's Rasool Berry, the host of the *Where Ya From?* Podcast. You know that saying that all good things must come to an end? Well, I've never been a fan of it, though I have noticed that in life, it is true. Whether it's a book that's a real page-turner, a binge-worthy television series, or yes, even a favorite podcast.

It is really true that, at least on this side of eternity, all good things must come to an end. And so we're announcing the end of the *Where Ya From?* Podcast. It's a bittersweet moment to share that we are retiring the podcast because we don't want it to end in some way. It's been an incredible ride. But it's sweet because of the incredible journey that we've been on over the last five years. And so we're going to share some final thoughts and reflections about the podcast. What we've learned and just kind of reflect on, hopefully, the experiences that you have had as well.

I want to share some of my main takeaways from *Where Ya From?*, as well as share with you what's next for our team. But first we want to thank you for being a part of this journey. There are over 4 million podcasts in the world. And thanks to you, *Where Ya From?* has outperformed an overwhelming majority. And most of you have stuck around to the end of our episodes and knowing that these stories have made an impact in you, has made them such a joy to create. And these stories have stuck with me too. And so I'd like to share with you my top five takeaways. And then share with you what we'll be working on next.

Number one, it is better to listen than to speak. James 1 verses 19 and 20 tells us, "My dear brothers and sisters, take note of this. Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to become angry. Because human anger does not produce the righteousness that God desires." When Daniel Ryan Day and I first began discussing the idea of what would become *Where Ya From?* way back in 2019, this was before most people knew what a coronavirus was, or a Zoom meeting, or anything like that. And back then it was at a time when people were increasingly polarized and divided.

I know, I know it's hard to imagine because that's nothing like now, right? But we saw dynamic believers leaning into polarized topics and issues and bearing amazing fruit for the kingdom of God. And we wondered, how could we tell more people about the work that they're doing without people getting defensive, upset, or just tuning us out? We thought the best way for us to introduce the ideas and work would be for us to tell the people's stories behind them. Why do they do what they do? How did they get into that work? How did they arrive at their understanding of God in the Bible? And how is their work informed by their faith?

When we received the green light to do a pilot of the podcast, we started scheduling interviews before we knew if it would work or what we will call it. Because I have a social science research background, I instinctively sought to establish some consistency in our approach, right? Like our methodology. So I would start from the beginning of the story and ask *Where Ya From?*.

When we had to come up with the name for the show, Daniel said, I noticed you always start the interview with the question, "Where ya from?". So how about we call it that? And a podcast was born. The title only exists because someone was quick to listen and slow to speak. The wisdom of that biblical principle has shaped my life ever since.

After hundreds of hours of hosting conversations, I find myself more persuaded than ever that it is better to listen than to speak. And that asking questions, helps us learn more than making statements. Especially in our world of increasing diversity, when people's understandings of themselves is more and more complex, listening to these diverse voices helps us empathize and understand who they are apart from the stereotypical way we are often presented.

What would happen in a world of intensifying hostility if the church modeled what it looked like to be quicker to listen than to speak? Well, from my experience and hosting *Where Ya From?*, it would result in us having a greater appreciation for each other in spite of our differences. It would result in more love and less hate.

I'm grateful for our producers in helping us maintain a balanced ratio of women to men. That was an intentional priority. And the 37 episodes, which have featured women, have helped make me more aware of the blinders I often have as a man. Conversations like those with author Carolyn Custis James, gospel legend Kierra Sheard-Kelly, entrepreneur Dr. Jeanne Porter King, gospel jazz artist Ruth Naomi Floyd, and public theologian Ekemini Uwan, and so many others have enlightened me to the challenges inherent in being a woman in our world. Carolyn's reminder of how, from the beginning, God established the blessed alliance of women and men to build his kingdom has really shaped me.

These insights have also been so helpful for me personally. I'm now more prone to ask the women around me about their experiences and allowing their perspectives to inform my own. As a pastor and ministry leader this has been really essential to my own development. Additionally, hearing from others has helped me to see what I previously didn't, which leads me to lesson number two from *Where Ya From?*.

Multiple perspectives help us see God's goodness. We read in Proverbs 12:30, "The way of a fool is right in his own eyes, but he who heeds counsel is wise." We see this principle play out in sports. In any sport nowadays, you see instant replays which determine critical questions that will determine winning and losing in many a fan's mood. In those games, the more angles there are, the easier it is for the officials to determine. Did the person score? Was there a foul committed? Did time run out? They know it would be foolish, and perhaps even dangerous, for them to determine these things based solely on their own eyes.

They must pursue counsel. And like in sports, having multiple angles helps us to see God's goodness. Over the last five years, we have had guests like Dr. Alma Zaragoza-Petty, who was born in Mexico. Lily Meschi from Iran. Justin Brierley, who was born in and recorded from the United Kingdom. Dr. Soong-Chan Ra, who was born in South Korea. Ketchi Okwuchi from Nigeria. Cameron Arnett from Haiti. Lina AbuJamra from Lebanon, and people from all over the United States of America. Indigenous voices, Latino voices, European American voices, Asian American voices, African American voices, all have contributed to a more robust 360-degree vision of God's kingdom.

Dr. Esau McCulley's insights in "Reading While Black" expresses this so well. The questions we often come to God with reflect our culture, regardless of where we're from. And God's timeless answers offer universal wisdom that we can all benefit from. Sometimes it's been hard to hear how some narratives can challenge our own. Hearing Mark Charles and Renee Begay discuss the trauma in the Native American community because of the harmful

missionary practices and ways that the U. S. government oppressed their ancestors was not easy to hear. But hearing their stories of resilience and faith in Christ also offers us hope that we can learn from their stories to make our story better now and in the future.

All of this is more possible when we take the time to try on different lenses than the cultural ones that we typically wear. It's not that those lenses are always wrong, but they are often limited, and sometimes distorted. Seeing the same play from different angles helps us to see what we thought was definitely a score was actually a foul.

For example, I didn't grow up around gangs, so I never really understood the draw to them. They seem dangerous, and even foolish to be a part of. But talking to Lecrae, about how he yearned to learn what it meant to be a man and to be affirmed by the older men in his community who were gang leaders helped me to see the attraction more. And it also helped me to understand why the alternative he created in the 116 Clique meant so much to him, Tedashii, Trip Lee and so many others that we interviewed with Reach Records. Hearing from other people and trying on those lenses really matters.

The third thing I learned is that struggle is the birthplace of strength. A consistent theme I've noticed is how often the guests have had to overcome a struggle in order to get where they are now. And even how, if it had not been for those struggles, they would not even be where they are today. And given the wide range of guests that we had on the show, that's saying something. From pastors, professors, and producers of film. To authors, activists, and artists, the theme of struggle was always there.

This theme was especially clear in my interviews with the artists that we talked to. Propaganda endured the struggles of street life and learning Mexican culture before losing himself in art. Aitina Fareed-Cooke wrestled with her identity in foster care and now is a sought-after mentor and a beloved mother.

All of these folks taught me how to see the challenges in my past, and even in my present, in a more redemptive light. Romans 8:28 tells us, "And we know that in all things, God works for the good of those who love him, who've been called according to his purpose." All things. The fact that struggle is the birthplace of strength reveals why the best art often comes from hard situations. God blesses the broken and restores beauty from ashes. Injustice is a major source of those struggles, which is why, whether it has been human trafficking, racism, sexism, domestic abuse, or other issues, they have been spotlighted on *Where Ya From?*.

The fourth of the five lessons that I've learned is read widely. And also use life hacks. In preparation for *Where Ya From?* alone, I've read over 40 books. The stories and ideas and footnotes in these books all have contributed to my faith and understanding in meaningful ways. Now, I've also learned a key important life hack with this. And that is to download both the Kindle version and the Audible version of a book at the same time, listen to the Audible at 3x speed, and then just highlight the key important sections.

Now, that's how you can get through a book in three hours or less when you have an interview coming up right afterwards. So that's just a little hot tip from me. But really, reading widely has helped me to extend and expand what I think about and how I think about it. For example, I think about Andy Crouch's book, *The Tech-Wise Family* and *Culture*

*Making.* In those books, he lays out so beautifully the importance of us thinking critically about technology. And really one of the things from that book that I still try to do, and I struggle with it, is to not charge my phone next to my bed at night and try to place it somewhere else. And in general, try to minimize how much I'm online all the time.

Andy helped me to see that these devices have a forming factor to us. They can shape us in ways that we're not aware of. And that's just one example. There have been so many great books that we've been able to read and I'd recommend that you check out the show notes in Andy Crouch's episode, or Dr. Nicole Martin, or some of the other incredible authors like Dr. Justo Gonzalez, who's written a whole bunch of books that you can look at. Because I think in those books, you will see the type of transformation that is possible when we think deeply and richly.

And also we kind of get the cheat code and the crib notes of all the research that they've done, as a result. So read widely and try to check out that life hack of, you know, listening to Audible on three times fast. You'd be surprised.

Okay. Fifth: always ask where ya from. It's become a funny habit for me now. Usually when I meet people, whether it's in a ride-share vehicle, at a conference, or at a church, I instinctively ask, "Where ya from?". My favorite reaction that I've had on the show and in real life is: it's complicated. That response opens the door to new stories and connections that always rewards and never takes away.

I encourage you to ask, "Where ya from?" more often. It will help you to understand the world around you better, and the people around you better as well. You could be a part of the *Where Ya From?* movement, right? That lives on when we find that it's better to listen than to speak, to pursue multiple angles to understand a vision for our world better. To recognize that struggle is the birthplace of strength, and that we should read widely and ask others, "Where ya from?".

When we started *Where Ya From?*, it was the first project of its kind at Our Daily Bread Ministries that explored the intersection of faith and culture. We started in 2020 and the impact of *Where Ya From?* has led to more projects from The VOICES Collection of Our Daily Bread Ministries. VOICES amplifies the voices of Black Christian content creators and has, since the start of *Where Ya From?*, also created the *Juneteenth: Faith in Freedom* film, which has been an award-winning film that PBS actually picked up and also distributed. The Whole Man Project, which is a book and a video series, And so much more. This is what happens when we make space for more stories in our communities. We are changed and those around us are too.

And we can't tell the story of *Where Ya From?* and VOICES without shouting out those who paved the way at Our Daily Bread Ministries for it to happen. So thank you to Mrs. Joyce Dinkins, the first senior editor of VOICES, who laid the foundation in prayer and her work as an editor for years. To Chriscynethia Floyd, the Vice President of Publishing for our Daily Bread Ministries, who has been a tireless champion of VOICES and *Where Ya From?*.

Thank you to Katara Patton, the current Senior Editor of VOICES, whose keen editorial eye and ear for detail has been instrumental to the development of VOICES. If you haven't

listened to the episodes featuring Joyce, Chriscynethia, and Katara, please do so. You'll be incredibly inspired by these remarkable women who have powerful stories to tell in their own right.

We also want to shout out Toria Keyes for her work in developing the Experience VOICES Instagram page. And please check out that page and follow us now for more information and content about what VOICES is doing.

The media team of Our Daily Bread Ministries has been the engine behind this podcast. Thank you to Dave Gavette for his leadership of the team and support of *Where Ya From?*. Thank you to Daniel Ryan Day, the co-creator of *Where Ya From?*.

Mary Jo Clark, the OG podcast producer and team lead. Jade Gustman, who has produced episodes in the past and always keeps her ear to the streets of *Where Ya From?*. And last, but definitely not least, Ryan Clevenger, the current producer and my partner in crime, whose keen ear edits and makes each episode better, and makes me sound better than I actually do.

We also want to shout out to Christianity Today, whose partnership helped get these stories out to more people. And of course, you, the faithful listener. So what's next?

Well, we're excited to announce the launch of a new project that we are doing in partnership with the Thriving Black Church Initiative at Our Daily Bread Ministries, and Christianity Today, that will focus on the remarkable story of the perseverance of the black church post-COVID, five years after the pandemic. Stay tuned for that in fall 2025.

So what does that mean for season eight? Well, in this season, we want to share the episodes that have impacted me the most. Like the best of the best. And since I'm sharing my top takeaways and favorite episodes, I'd love for you to share yours too. What were your favorite episodes? Your takeaways from *Where Ya From?* ?

Go to our Experience VOICES Facebook page or Instagram account, and look for this *Where Ya From?* Episode, right? And then just comment inside of that post. Or simply email us at [info@experiencevoices.org](mailto:info@experiencevoices.org). And hey, who knows, maybe your favorite episode will get added to the list for season eight. So stay subscribed to the podcast and remember, it's not just about where you're at, it's also about where ya from.

This episode was produced by Ryan Clevenger and Mary Jo Clark. We also want to send a special thank you and shout-out to all of you for supporting and promoting *Where Ya From?* over the last five years. Thanks, y'all.