



THE LOOP OF DESPAIR

Revival | 1.25.26

Steve Frissell

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Well, good morning again. Thank you for worshiping with us today, and this is bringing me flashbacks to covid. Me here at the church doing a sermon into a camera. You at home, hanging out and worshiping there. How'd you make it through covid? I made it through by eating a whole lot of Sweet Potato Potato chips. Potato Chips never tasted better. I don't know why. Anyway, here we are worshiping together, and earlier in the service, we'll ask you to get a candle. I hope you got that. If you can take that, I want you to go ahead and light your candle. I'm going to light mine. And this is a little cheesy, but I want us to do this anyway, because I think, I think this may help all of us today is we're not in the worship center together, worshiping like we normally do, but the God we worship is with every single one of us. So light your candle, and let that flame, every time it catches your eye, remind you that God's presence is right there with you, and while we're all separated geographically, we're united in the fact that God's presence is with every single one of us. So look at that flame God's with you right now. Take a breath, and I'm gonna pray, and we invite him to speak to every single one of us. God, thank you for uniting us in Your presence, and we're grateful that you are with every single one of us right now, right here, in this moment, I'm gonna ask that you speak, that you work, that you move in my heart, in my mind, and in the hearts and the minds of my sisters and brothers, in your name, we pray amen. Well, we've been in this series on Revival and Liban's been teaching has given us a grand vision for what revival can be in Word, power and deed. Last week, he spent some time talking to us about this, the things that we do in the midst of revival and the way God is working, and that we get a calling, and that we also go through this season of consecration, and that we contend in prayer. And we've been using this book, longing for revival as the guide for us as we've been walking through this series on Revival. And in this book, the authors give us an image that gives us a picture of the faith journey we go through as we are going through this journey of revival and what God's doing in our lives. And so, as Liban was sharing last week, he was talking about in the very beginning, as we have a calling, that calling starts with this holy burden. Last year, we are doing a series in Nehemiah, and as we wrapped up the series, this is one of the things that we talked about, that God gives us things, things that break his heart, he lets those things break our heart. And I shared this in the sermon that day that God's gave me a heart for the orphan, which led to us being an adoptive family, right? So God breaks your heart. There's these discontents that you get, these things that bother you, and it could be an injustice in the world, or a marginalized people group, or it could be something specific or a specific person. And he gives us lots of these. One of the ones for me is orphan, but there's so many other discontents burdens that come on my heart. And part of this faith journey for us is that there's this beginning of us having this burden, and then we grow to realize the calling that God has, and that this isn't just a thing that's a me thing, but it's a God thing. It really is a burden that comes from God. And so this is a calling upon my life. But then as we head into the consecration, there's this crucified hope, where, as Liban talked about, in the consecration, there's this stripping away of our self reliance, and we may even find ourselves as we're going through the consecration of it, that crucified hope, that we get to a point where we find ourselves almost in crisis, where it's like we're realizing this may cost me to sacrifice more than I'm willing to. And we can struggle with a crisis of faith in this moment, and this is where we contend, and we continue to persistently go to God for the things that are on our heart. And sometimes what we see is God show up in a remarkable, miraculous way, and we have a revived hope and our faith, oh, there's a breakthrough faith that we experience sometimes when we're in this crisis of faith moment and we're contending, God doesn't show up the way we thought, but he shows up in a in a way. It's not exactly how we prayed. But still, we have a revived hope and breakthrough faith. What can happen for us sometimes, though, is we find ourselves in this point, and we're contending, and it seems like we're contending, and no one's listening, and God doesn't show up, and we move into a place where it's the loop of despair, where we're doubting and we're wondering, I think if you've been walking for Jesus for a while, you've. I probably at some point found yourself in this place, the loop of despair. In my 20s, my early

20s, my grandmother was sick and she was nearing the end. Now, my grandmother, she had a significant influence in my life and all my cousins, we all had stories and moments where we were hurt or something was going on, and she prayed for healing for us. And so we decided, as the cousins, let's go surround grandmama, she's lying in her bed, clinging to life, and let's pray in faith for her healing, because we all wanted more time with her. So we circled all around and we prayed scripture, and we prayed full of faith, totally believing that God was going to heal, expecting her to live longer, because we so wanted that time with her, and days later, she dies, me and all my cousins sank into a loop of despair where we're wondering, God, you answer some prayers, but not ours. You heal some but not our grandmother. We grew doubts, our unmet expectations. These disappointments became a weight of disbelief. And if you've been walking through faith and with Jesus for some time, you've probably at some point found yourself in the loop of despair. In fact, you might be there now. You've been praying and you're going, God, where are you? Why haven't you shown up? Can I even trust you? See, when we get into the place where the loop of despair, hoping in God feels too risky, we get to the point where it's like, I don't even know if I can trust you anymore. God, you seem too risky to put my hope in. And if this is where you find yourself today, this is what we're going to speak to. How do we move out of the loop of despair so that we get to a point where hoping in God doesn't feel risky anymore? And I think the big thing that makes a massive difference is the way in which we contend, how we pray, shifts and changes our hearts that leads us out of this loop of despair. We're going to look at a teaching that Jesus gave on prayer. In fact, the Gospels, they're full of his teachings and even moments where we get to see him praying, this is something I've wondered often, is I wonder what it was like for the disciples to watch Jesus pray, to hear his prayers. I mean, think about this. They got to see firsthand the unique Prayer Life of the Son of God to the Father God. Jesus prayed in such a way that was so profound for them that at some point they went to him and they're like, Can you teach us to pray like they were realizing that like the way this guy prays is so different. So teach us, teach us to pray like you. And here's a teaching that Jesus gave his disciples on prayer. We find it in Matthew chapter six,

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Jesus says to His disciples and others, therefore you should pray like this. Now I don't know what your church tradition is. Where you grow up, some church traditions, they memorize this prayer. You might be familiar with it. It's the Lord's Prayer. It's a great prayer to memorize, and you can pray it like a script, but Jesus didn't give this to us to be a scripted prayer. It's a guide and way in which we can direct our hearts when we pray. What I do find fascinating, though, is that the disciples were used to scripted prayers. There was a multiple prayers, but there was an anchor prayer that they prayed called the Amida. This was a standing daily prayer. This was a 17 and then eventually became 18 petitions that they would bring to God in Hebrew. The formation of it started in 400 BC and was finalized somewhere around 100 AD. And so what the disciples and the Jews at this time were used to is praying this very specific Hebrew prayer. And it had three sections. The first section of it was praises to God. And they would praise God of Abraham Isaac and Jacob. They would praise God for having power over life and death. They praise God for being holy. So there was offerings of praise. Then they also had a whole list of requests, things they asked God for. And this isn't all of them, but here's a few of the things they would ask God for. They would ask God for the ability to think and understand, for help to follow the law. I think if I were them, I would have been praying this one a whole lot, because I wonder what it was like to live under that standard of always trying to keep the law. They knew they couldn't do it so they're like, God, would you help us follow the law? And then they would not do it so well, so they would have to ask God to forgive them of their sins. I find this interesting. They also asked God to punish slanderers. Jesus. They asked God to inflict like suffering on people who were their enemies. And they also asked God to support the righteous people who were his people, the Jews. So these are some of the things that they would ask for. And then the third section was thanking God. They had some different things. I love this first one that they would thank God for allowing them to pray. I love that just recognizing and acknowledging the fact that I get to pray to you, God wells up gratitude. There's also a general blessing of thanks that they would offer to God as well. So this is the Amidah. This is what the disciples were used to praying. And now with that in mind, let's take a look at the rest of what Jesus says around prayer and contrast it and see how radically different his teaching is to what they were used to. So he says, You can pray like this our Father in heaven, your name be honored as holy. Now, throughout the Old Testament, there's a there are a dozen references to God as a father, but it says God is a father, or God is like a father. But at no point in the Old Testament does anyone ever speak directly to God and refer to him as father. And here what Jesus does is he's teaching them to pray. He says, You can speak to God and directly call him dad. Isn't that beautiful? I mean, in the Amida, they're praising the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, like you're our ancestors God. But here what they're invited to is go right to them and say, Dad, they can address the father directly. Now, here's another thing that is just so wild to think about our Bible. It's in English, and it's been translated from the Greek, right? And I don't know if you've thought about this, but Jesus and the disciples didn't speak Greek, they spoke Aramaic, and then they were directed to pray in Hebrew, right? So that's four languages that we just mentioned. We

read the Bible in English. It was translated from the Greek. Jesus and the disciples didn't speak Greek, they spoke Aramaic, and when they prayed, they prayed in Hebrew. Look at what Dr Kenneth Bailey has to say about this passage here. The modern consensus among scholars is that the Lord's prayer begins with the Aramaic word Abba. And therefore we can assume that Jesus taught His disciples to pray in the Aramaic of daily communication, rather than the classic Hebrew of the written text. So for so long, for the disciples, they prayed in a place where it was like the sacred language is Hebrew. But what Jesus is inviting them to is you can pray in your common everyday language, your heart language, is the one that you can bring to God. So whatever language you speak, God's inviting you to bring your heart language to him and go right straight to dad. Now also, let's take a look at where this dad is, our Father in heaven, Now at the time of Christ, and especially in their culture, you didn't move away from dad. Like everyone stayed close. Like there was generations of people that all stayed in the same area. I moved away from what was home. So my dad, he's still in Florida. Our Heavenly dad, he's in heaven. How powerful is that let's just take a moment and think about this. The one we pray to is so holy that He is God Who reigns in heaven, and he is enthroned on the praises of all the angels. When you hop into the Bible and you look at what the prophetic things and visions of what's happening in heaven, it's intense, and God is receiving incredible worship from every being. This is the one who we're praying to. It's the God that says I am near enough that you can call me dad, and I am holy enough that I am God who reigns from heaven. That is who we get to pray to. Jesus goes on after this part, and he continues, and he says, the thing that you the next thing you can pray is that your kingdom would come and that your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Jesus taught often on the kingdom. There are so many beautiful stories and parables and understandings that we can get from the kingdom. But it's also confusing. There's these paradoxes. The kingdom is both now and not yet. It can be pretty confusing. And one of the things that's a little confusing is Jesus just never defined the kingdom like. He never said, Here's what the kingdom is like. He said the kingdom is like a lot. Thoughts, and he would have these beautiful descriptions. So there's no actual definition that Jesus gave, but here's a definition that I really like about the kingdom. This is from Jeremy treat. It says the kingdom is God's reign through God's people over God's place. The Kingdom has a King Who reigns, and he reigns through his people over his place, and Jesus is inviting us to pray Kingdom prayers, God, may Your kingdom come. Would you bring your king, your reign that you have through your people in your place? And what God's inviting us to what Jesus is saying when we can pray Your kingdom come. He's inviting us to pray a prayer that's much bigger and broader than our world, our circumstances, our immediate things that are right in front of us. And he's invited us to pray the larger meta narrative of what God's been doing through all of humanity and all of time, your game breaking kingdom that is changes everything. Would you bring that kingdom here? This is a much broader prayer, and this is the prayer for revival. That's what revival is. Is his kingdom coming and His will being done here on Earth, like his will from heaven to earth. In Heaven, God's will, it's like a river that just runs and flows, and nothing prevents HIS WILL from happening in heaven. But here on earth, there is sin that prevents His will and His will is good for all people sin in this we're in this space where there is still sin in this world, and we're in that now and not yet, part of the Kingdom Jesus His death and His resurrection. It defeats sin and death. So we are in this Now, part of the Kingdom where we are a new creation, and we have been brought to life, but we're in this world where there still is sin, and that sin brings death, destruction, pain and suffering. You feel it? I do too. So when we pray this prayer, God, would your kingdom come and would your heaven will, your good perfect will, the will that is done on earth or done in heaven, will you bring that here on Earth? This is a prayer. These Heaven to Earth. Prayers change the way in which we pray, because we're inviting him to do what is his good will, and it gives us hope because we know His will is good, that we could trust him. It lets us it reminds us that our future hope matters for us in our current reality. It gives us that perspective.

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The next thing that Jesus invites us to consider, when we pray, is that we would bring this petition Give us today our daily bread. Now if you want to nerd out and study some stuff, you can look into what this word daily might mean. It's such a huge debate, and it's confusing, because in all of Greek literature, there's minimal usage of the word that Matthew has here for daily, is it the amount of bread? Is it the timing of bread? There's a whole lot of debate around this, and it's fascinating to read, and at the end of the day, you won't know either. What I think we can understand that Jesus is inviting to us, to whatever you think the word daily might mean, is that God is inviting us to make a prayer where we go, God, would you bring me the bread, which is the things that we need for life, the to sustain us? Would you bring the things that I need, the sustaining life that never ends? Would you bring me the bread that never runs out? If you think about the fear that we have that there won't be enough that is so crushing to our soul, and the decisions that we've made and the things we've done, they've hurt people, because we've been operating from a place where we're afraid if it's going to run out. I mean, I don't know if any of y'all did this, but heading into this weekend and the storm, did you run to the store and did you buy more toilet paper than you need, maybe, and I get it. You don't want to go through what you went through with covid and you

had to use a coffee filter. That was terrible. I understand. But when we live our lives with this thing, where it's we're being like, motivated and running with this fear that things are going to run out, and I have to be the one that's going to make sure I have all the provisions I need for my life that is damaging to our soul and the way we live in that space damages our relationship. So Jesus is saying, Hey, you can pray a prayer where you're going, God, would you remove the fear? Hear from me that I can rest knowing that today you will give me what I need and the confidence that you'll give me what I need tomorrow, the bread that never runs out. Then Jesus says something that I think had to throw the disciples off so much. He says, and would you forgive us of our debts. Now this was something that they prayed in the Amidah, that they would ask for forgiveness. But then Jesus does something radical, and he says, As we also have forgiven our debtors, Jesus hints to a New Covenant reality that the forgiven can forgive, that this is something that we actually have capacity for because we have the one who forgives dwelling inside of us and as we rest in our identity as being forgiven, we are now moved to where we can forgive others in the Amidah the way they prayed before. Is God. Would you bring punishment? Would you crush the evildoers, the people who have wronged us. They didn't have a category for the kind of forgiveness that Jesus brought. They had no understanding for Jesus, who would end up on a cross, clinging to life, gasping for air, looking down into a crowd, seeing the people who are cheering on his suffering and his death, and he says, Father, would you forgive them because they don't know what they're doing. This is the forgiveness that we've been given. This is who forgives us, and that's the forgiveness that dwells in us. And I don't know all the circumstances of your life and my life, though the people who have hurt me the most are brothers and sisters in Christ. I mean, I do most my life in proximity with other believers, and I know that I've hurt and I've wounded and I've offended people who needed to forgive me. It's it's a part of life. But if you find yourself in a relationship where there is brokenness right now, I want you to imagine what might happen if you prayed together. Because here's the thing, as Jesus is walking through this prayer, none of it's singular. He's saying, Our Father in heaven, Give us this day our daily bread, forgive us of our trespasses as we forgive each other. It's all communal. It's in community that we pray. He's not saying, Hey, here's a wonderful thing for you to pray all by yourself, which you can what he's also saying is that you should be praying this with other people. And I wonder what would happen if you have a sister or a brother where there is an offense and you've struggled to forgive what might happen if the two of you get together and you pray, and both of you are praying and saying, God, you have forgiven both of us. Would you lead us to forgive each other? What might happen? Here's the last part of what we're going to look at today. Jesus says you can also pray and say and do not bring us into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one. Now as a kid, when I would look at this verse, I would go, God, I can find just enough temptation on my own. I really don't need you leading me to more like I am good at getting in trouble. What I learned later in James one we learned that God does not tempt us. He can't, and he doesn't, so we can rest assured God doesn't lead us to temptation. In fact, another way that you can actually translate this word is trial. God does let trials come into our life. But the prayer we can pray here is God, would you not lead us into the trials, but actually, would you deliver us? Would you protect us from the evil one? Jesus is inviting us to pray a prayer that is to the Good Shepherd, saying, Jesus, would you guide me as my good shepherd? Because a good Shepherd leads his sheep to still waters to green pastures, and even when we do go into the valley, there is a shadow of death, but it is not death, it is just the shadow, and we can be in that space, trusting that We have a good shepherd there with us, guiding us when we pray these kind of prayers. God would you rid me of the fear and let me trust you for my provisions. God would you help me forgive others and be my forgiveness and everything I need in that space? God would you protect me, give me everything I need as my good shepherd. These are prayers where we begin to realize that prayer isn't about us, reminding God what we need. This actually leads us to pray anywhere where we're reminded that all we need is God. He has you, he has me. You're gonna be okay. You. You're going to be okay. These are the kind of prayers that move us out of that place where we live in a loop of despair, where trusting in God feels way too risky. What I've discovered about me in my life is when I have moved into the place of despair. It's because my prayers have been around this place where I'm coming to God with my expectations. I'm coming to God and that really is the place and where my heart is that I'm going to God with, Hey, God, here's what I expect the outcome to be. I'm going to God with demands, rather than coming to him with desires and asking him to lead me to desire His good, heavenly will. I try to manage God, and I feel like my faith journey is me just going back and forth and growing and getting better and better at moving from having expectations of God and trying to manage him to a place of expectancy that rests in him. Because when we can operate from and have a faith in this place, and pray from this place, and we move to expectancy instead of expectation, we're Resting in God that He is dad. He's near enough to be called dad and holy enough to be God in heaven that he is the King Who reigns over the kingdom, who has a good will for his people, that he really is sufficient, and he gives us everything we need. He gives our daily provisions. He's given us what we've always needed most, and that's forgiveness. And He guides us like a good shepherd. When I'm remembering who I'm praying to, I shift from expectations to expectancy, and when I'm praying from this place all those unmet expectations, I can actually bring them back to God. And He rebuilds my faith, and he pulls me out of the loop of despair. So have your prayers been a

prayer and a place from expectation, making demands of God? Or have you been in a posture and a place of expectancy bringing your desires to God? Have you been focused on the outcomes of what you expect God to bring? Or are you offering your life to Jesus and whatever outcome he desires for His kingdom and His purposes, if you're in the loop of despair right now? Or maybe if you're not, here's something I think would be great to do this week, is, what if you took time every day this week, starting tomorrow, and you lit a candle to be a reminder that God is right there with you. What if you did that and you took a breath said, God, I know you're here right now.

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And what if you prayed the Lord's Prayer? And maybe what feels easiest for you is just to open up your Bible to Matthew chapter six and and pray it like a script. But let it not just be words that come from your mouth, but let it be something that he's doing to move and transform your heart. And I wonder what he'll do if you take time every day this week, just to be still for a moment, sit in his presence, breathe and talk to dad, who reigns from heaven, who's a king on a throne that has a much bigger grand thing that he's doing through all of humanity, bringing his kingdom through you, his will on this earth, through you, and that he has you, that you, yes, you can take all your wants and your needs to him. He's invited us to do that. We're to ask and seek and knock. We're supposed to take all our things to him. He's told us to but we don't have to just take him just those things we can pray bigger prayers and prayers that move us to a point where we're not just bringing him our needs, but recognizing that he's all we need. Let's take a moment and let's just pray this prayer together right now. Father, Dad, you reign in heaven, and you are enthroned on the praises of your angels. May Your kingdom come, may Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Would you do that in my life, in the lives of my sisters and brothers? Let your kingdom reign and your will be done. On through us in others, would you give us our daily bread? Remove the fear that things will run out and that we can rest in your sufficiency, your provisions, remind us how forgiven we are and move us to forgive and give it away quickly. And would you be our good shepherd? Would you guide us? Protect us from trials, protect us from the evil one? In Your name, we pray amen.