

1 Samuel 12

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[0 : 00] Well, friends, I wonder if you've ever been in a situation or in a relationship.

Look at that. They don't teach you these things in seminary, how to work music stands. There we go.

Friends, I wonder if you've ever been in a relationship or in a situation where you feel like you've totally blown it. Well, if so, then this text is for you and it's for me tonight.

We're looking at 1 Samuel chapter 12. 1 Samuel chapter 12. You can follow along in the Pew Bible. Well, Samuel's, the books of 1 and 2 Samuel are a little ways into the Old Testament.

You can find them there. The page number's in the bulletin. We're going to have it on the screens too. 1 Samuel chapter 12. Let me read this chapter for us. It's not a long one. And Samuel said to all Israel, Behold, I have obeyed your voice and all that you have said to me and have made a king over you.

[1 : 21] And now behold, the king walks before you and I am old and gray and behold, my sons are with you. I've walked before you from my youth until this day. Here I am. Testify against me before the Lord and before his anointed. Whose ox have I taken or whose donkey have I taken or whom have I defrauded?

Whom have I oppressed or from whose hand have I taken a bribe to blind my eyes with it? And he said, Testify against me and I will restore it to you. They said, You have not defrauded us or oppressed us or taken anything from any man's hand.

And he said to them, The Lord is witness against you and his anointed is witness this day that you have not found anything against, not found anything in my hand. And they said, He is witness.

And Samuel said to the people, The Lord is witness who appointed Moses and Aaron and brought your fathers up out of the land of Egypt. Now, therefore, stand still that I might plead with you before the Lord concerning all the righteous deeds of the Lord that he performed for you and for your fathers.

When Jacob went into Egypt and the Egyptians oppressed them, then your fathers cried out to the Lord and the Lord sent Moses and Aaron who brought your fathers out of Egypt and made them dwell in this place. But they forgot the Lord their God.

[2 : 28] And he sold them into the hand of Sisera, commander of the army of Hazor, and into the hand of the Philistines and into the hand of the king of Moab. And they fought against them. And they cried out to the Lord and said, We have sinned because we have forsaken the Lord and have served the Baals and the Ashtaroth.

But now deliver us out of the hand of our enemies that we may serve you. And the Lord sent Jeroboam and Barak and Jephthah and Samuel and delivered you out of the hand of your enemies on every side.

And you lived in safety. And when you saw that Nahash, the king of the Ammonites, came against you, you said to me, No, but a king shall reign over us when the Lord your God was your king.

And now behold, the king whom you have chosen, for whom you have asked. Behold, the Lord has set a king over you. If you will fear the Lord and serve him and obey his voice and not rebel against the commandment of the Lord, and if both you and the king who reigns over you will follow the Lord your God, it will be well.

But if you will not obey the voice of the Lord, but rebel against the commandment of the Lord, then the hand of the Lord will be against you and your king. Now, therefore, stand still and see this great thing that the Lord will do before your eyes.

[3 : 37] Is it not wheat harvest today? I will call upon the Lord that he may send thunder and rain, and you shall know and see that your wickedness is great, which you have done in the sight of the

Lord in asking for yourselves a king.

So Samuel called upon the Lord, and the Lord sent thunder and rain that day, and all the people greatly feared the Lord and Samuel. And all the people said to Samuel, Pray for your servants to the Lord your God that we may not die, for we have added to all our sins this evil to ask for ourselves a king.

Samuel said to the people, Do not be afraid. You have done all this evil, yet do not turn aside from following the Lord, but serve the Lord with all your heart.

And do not turn aside to empty things that cannot profit or deliver, for they are empty. For the Lord will not forsake his people, for his great name's sake, because it has pleased the Lord to make you a people for himself.

Moreover, as for me, far be it for me that I should sin against the Lord by ceasing to pray for you, and I will instruct you in the good and the right way. Only fear the Lord and serve him faithfully with all your heart, for consider what great things he has done for you.

[4 : 48] But if you still do wickedly, you shall be swept away, both you and your king. Well, in this chapter, the people of Israel had really blown it.

We've been following their story in 1 Samuel for the last number of weeks, and at this point in the story, an enemy had arisen against Israel named Nahash the Ammonite. Greg talked about him last week.

And in the face of that threat, instead of the people turning to the Lord as their king, to be their rescuer, as they had done for generations and generations, instead, they turned to Samuel and they asked him for a human king.

And as we saw a few chapters ago in chapter 8, they did so for all the wrong reasons. At the core, what was their heart motivation for wanting a king? Well, it says that they wanted to be like all the other nations around them.

In other words, Israel, instead of following God's call, and following him and being in a relationship with him and being distinct from all their neighbors, and so being salt and light to them as this distinct people, the people turn to Samuel and say, No, we don't want to be distinct from our neighbors.

[6 : 00] We want to actually be just like our neighbors. We want to conform to them. And we want a king just like them. So they asked for a king so that they could be just like the other nations. And here, Samuel, the prophet and judge, gives his last major speech to the nation as their leader.

You see, the era of the judges in this chapter is coming to an end. The judges were those leaders that God rose up periodically throughout history to deliver Israel from her enemies. This era is ending, and this new era, the era of the kingship, is beginning.

Saul now is on the throne. At the end of chapter 11, he's coronated, and they're ready to go. And here is Samuel addressing the nation one last time as their leader.

And we see in the first half of this chapter, he does two things. First thing that Samuel does, very interestingly, is that he reaffirms, he sort of renews the people's covenant with God. That's verses 1 through 15.

He sort of renews their covenant. And then in verses 16 through 18, he brings before them the reality and the gravity of their sin. Now, all this might seem a little strange to us, but do you remember how, if you've read through some of the Old Testament, do you remember what happens at the end of the book of Deuteronomy?

[7 : 15] And some of you are thinking, I tried reading through the Bible once, I got through to Leviticus, and then I quit. So no, I don't know what happens at the end of Deuteronomy. Well, this is what happens at the end of Deuteronomy. Moses is standing before this wilderness generation, this second generation of people who have come out of Egypt, and they're on the verge of entering into the promised land.

And what Moses does with that new generation, he basically takes them and he says, we're going to renew the covenant between the people and your God. Now, a covenant, what's a covenant?

A covenant is a binding, deep, committed relationship between two parties. It's a deep, binding commitment or relationship. And at the heart of this deep, bound-together relationship that Israel had with the Lord, basically could be summed up in this phrase that happens over and over and over again in the Old Testament.

I will be your God, and you will be my people. So Moses takes this new generation and reaffirms all that. And interestingly, as you follow the biblical storyline, those kind of covenant reaffirmations happen again and again.

It happens at the end of Joshua, after this generation comes in and they occupy the land, now they're sort of at a new phase of its history. And what does Joshua do? He reaffirms the covenant with them. So that's what's happening here in 1 Samuel 12.

[8 : 28] Samuel's doing the same thing. The people of Israel standing on the verge of a new era of their history. And Samuel says, it's time to come back to your charter of existence, this covenant that you have between you and God.

In fact, what's very interesting is if you scan over the first, like, 15 verses of this chapter, it's actually kind of structured like old covenant treaties. Verses 1 through 5, Samuel's bringing out all the witnesses.

He's sort of proving that he's, you know, a worthwhile spokesman for God. And he brings out all these witnesses. That's how covenants usually started. They sort of called on the witnesses. Then he tells the history of the people. That's how covenants usually took off. You tell the history of the relationship between the two people, how they came together. And then you give the stipulations. This is what it means for you to be in this relationship.

This is what it means for you to be in this relationship. That's verses 14 and 15. So this is what Samuel's doing. But then something really interesting happens. After that, in verses 16 through 18, Samuel brings before the people's eyes the reality and the gravity of their sin.

[9 : 37] And as thunder booms across the sky, it's as if the people's hearts are finally shaken awake to see how foolish and how sinful they had been. God was and had been so faithful to them.

He was even now renewing his covenant with them. And yet, in their recent history, they had just been throwing it back in his face, asking and crying out for a different king, for a replacement king. Instead of saying, God, we trust you, and you're a good king to us, they said, we actually want a different king. No thanks. And isn't that the nature of all of our sin, that we ask for a substitute king? And Israel finally wakes up to this sort of giant act of cosmic treason that they had been committing. So at this point in the story, the people finally see they blow it.

Look again at verse 19. And all the people said to Samuel, pray for your servants to the Lord your God, that we may not die, for we have added to all our sins this evil to ask for ourselves a king.

[10 : 50] So pause for a moment. I wonder if you've ever been there, standing in Israel's shoes, suddenly realizing that you have royally messed it up, spiritually speaking.

That though God has been faithful to you, you have turned away from him. Maybe you got into a relationship that you know wasn't good for you, wasn't honoring to the Lord, and yet you got into it anyway.

Maybe it went too far. Maybe it caused all sorts of heartbreak. Maybe it was something that you did in secret. Maybe it was a sin no one else saw, and yet it still weighs heavy on your heart, and it doesn't seem to go away.

Maybe you just stopped caring much about God and started just pursuing success on the world's terms. You didn't really sort of out and out reject God, but you didn't exactly keep your relationship with him front and center in your life.

You sort of let your heart grow cold to him and chased after achievement and wealth and reputation and success. And then you woke up one day to realize that you were far away.

[12 : 05] Whatever it is, maybe you, like me, have stood there in their shoes knowing that you've blown it. And you don't need thunder and rain pounding overhead because inside your conscience is pounding just as loud as any storm.

And you wonder, like Israel, like Israel must have been wondering here, is God going to take me back? Or is God just going to cast me off? Isn't it very interesting that they say, pray to the Lord, you are God, Samuel.

Samuel just renewed the covenant with them, and suddenly they're thinking, is he even our God anymore? And we can think that. Am I a lost cause? Is there no way back for me?

Well, I think this issue is right where this passage speaks to us right now and right today. In the rest of this chapter, Samuel speaks right to this need to people who've totally blown it.

Here's what the Lord says. So I'm going to spend just the rest of our time together just looking at verses 20 through 25 and hearing what God is saying to us through Samuel. Let's start with verse

20.

[13:16] Samuel said to the people, don't be afraid. You have done all this evil, yet do not turn aside from following the Lord, but serve the Lord with all your heart.

Isn't it amazing that Samuel's first word is, don't be afraid. You're scared maybe God will never take you back. Maybe your spiritual life is over, but no, Samuel says, it's not the end of the story. And notice that we need not fear, not because our sin isn't really so bad after all. Isn't that often how we try to sort of make sense of things and deal with our spiritual failures?

Eh, it wasn't that bad. You know, other people have done a lot worse. We sort of try to make excuses and justify it. I was tired. I was caught off guard. But no, Samuel doesn't minimize it at all. He says, don't be afraid. You have done all this evil. Yes, your sin is great, but you can admit it and not turn away from it.

[14:15] You don't have to run away from reality by pretending it's not so bad after all, which, as you know, that strategy never really works in the long run, just sort of denying it and turning away from reality.

Instead, what does Samuel say? You have done all this evil, yet serve the Lord with all your heart. So you see, right at the start, Samuel is saying something is possible that in our mindset, when we mess up, we think it's impossible.

He's sort of opening up a horizon for us. He's saying, you think you've blown it, you think there's no going back, but you're wrong. There's still a place for you with the Lord. So come, come serve the Lord with all your heart.

You see, what Samuel's doing here is he's actually fighting against one of the most pernicious things that can happen to us when we stumble and when we sin. And that most pernicious thing isn't actually spiritual pride.

It's actually self-pity and shame. When we screw up, it's that voice that says, I'm a loser. I'm a goner.

[15:26] No one loves me. Not even the Lord. But Samuel comes and stops that voice right in its tracks and says, no, there is a place for you here. The Lord still wants your heart.

And he's calling you now to give it to him. You see, I think self-pity is kind of like a dark room with all the curtains closed.

And we don't think there's a way out or any way to change and we just sort of sit there in the darkness. But here comes Samuel marching in, throwing open the curtains, letting the sun come shining in, saying, look out the window.

Don't you see the fields and the mountains and the streams and the fresh air. Come on. Let's go. Don't wallow here. The Lord is calling you to come join him on the heights.

So right off the bat, Samuel says, don't minimize your sin, but don't fall prey to self-pity. Yes, your sin is bad, but it's a new day. Today is a new day. The curtains are open and you're being called forth.

[16:37] And next he says this. And do not turn aside after empty things that cannot profit or deliver for they're empty. You see, the Bible helps us understand our hearts, I think, better than anything else.

And this verse is showing us that our hearts will actually never really be neutral. The human heart was created to worship and worship it will.

And it will either worship God the creator or it will worship something else, some created thing.

There's no sort of Switzerland in the geography of the human heart.

There's no neutral territory in your spiritual makeup. And here in verse 21, Samuel says, look, if you don't turn to the Lord, you're going to turn aside to empty things.

Things, he says, that cannot profit or deliver. In other words, things that can't make your life good and things that can't stop making your life bad.

[17:40] They can't profit and they can't deliver. I think that's such an insightful and helpful phrase. I think I've been meditating on that all week as I thought about this passage. You know, do you want to know what's actually competing for God's place in your heart?

Do you want to shine some light on that? Do you want to know what you're worshiping instead of God? Ask yourself this question. What do I think I need in order to make my life truly good? How would you fill in that blank?

If I had this, then my life would be really good. Or you can ask this question. What do I think would stop my life being bad?

If only this, then my life wouldn't be so miserable, then I'd be free. friends. The reality is if we answer either of those questions with anything other than the Lord God himself, then you can already start to see what competing gods and kings are vying for your heart's affection.

Some of those things might not be wrong or bad in and of themselves, but your heart is still trying to get out of them what Samuel calls profit, that is lasting happiness, or deliverance, lasting freedom.

[19 : 06] You've made this good thing ironically into an empty thing. Now, why is this so important? Why does Samuel want us to hear this when we've spiritually blown it, when we're down in the dumps?

Because at those moments, those moments are when we are so susceptible to keep turning away from the Lord to those other things.

In our self-pity, in our fear, in our guilt, and in our shame, we end up latching our hearts onto something that only brings us more heartache.

And then we go in this downward spiral. One sin leads to guilt and shame, and then thinking that God will never take us back, we latch onto something else to dull the pain and comfort us, and that just sends us spiraling further down.

Isn't that how so many of us get caught up in the sinful and destructive patterns and habits and addictions? So in some sense, Samuel is doing something that's very insightful here.

[20 : 10] He's really helping us get our spiritual bearings to sort of look under the hood of our hearts and see what's really going on when we're down in the dumps. He's saying, you're going to be tempted to turn aside to empty things.

Don't travel down that road. Instead, come serve the Lord. Come home. And then Samuel comes really to the heart of the whole paragraph.

I thought about maybe preaching the whole sermon on this one verse, but I thought that wouldn't really do it justice. You know, he's been kind of clearing the ground so far. Don't be afraid. Don't go after empty things.

Now he kind of comes to the central driving knife's edge of the whole paragraph. Here comes the central message for those who've blown it. Verse 22, for the Lord will not forsake his people for his great namesake, because it has pleased the Lord to make you a people for himself.

You see, at the end, Samuel points us right back to God himself. The Lord, he says, will not forsake you. He won't abandon you or renounce you or cast you off.

[21 : 22] And then, he gives the reason. And shockingly, this reason has nothing to do with us. It's for his great namesake, he says. How did you think Samuel would answer that question?

Or answer that, sort of finish that line? The Lord will not forsake his people because you're really good after all. You're so lovely.

No, for his great namesake. You know, when we botch things up spiritually, we often end up looking at ourselves and then saying, God will never bring me back. And then, what we do is we look up at God and we think that God is also looking at us and sizing us up and considering all of our good and bad deeds and measuring and scrutinizing us to see whether he's actually going to take us back.

So we're looking at ourselves and then we think God's looking at us. But actually, who's God really looking at? He's not looking at us.

He's looking at himself. He's not asking, what I need to do. He's not sitting up there saying, hmm, what should I do based on who they are?

[22 : 40] He's saying, what am I going to do based on who I am? In other words, God's not going to act for our great namesake.

God's going to act for his great namesake. the Lord won't forsake you. Why? Because God is God. And what Samuel just told Israel as he renewed the covenant with them is that the Lord is faithful and he's never forsaken his people no matter what they've fallen into and God continues to be faithful to them.

And you know, the next verse is actually sort of an extension of God's faithfulness. As Samuel says, moreover, as for me, far be it from me that I should sin against the Lord by ceasing to pray for you and I'll instruct you in the good and right way.

You see, as an expression of the Lord's enduring faithfulness to his people, Samuel's going to keep doing what God tells him to do, to pray for them and to teach them. He's not going to give up on them. And God keeps doing that today.

He raises up leaders in the church and he raises up faithful friends in our lives who will pray for us and who will keep pointing us back to God's gracious living word. You know, it's interesting, we often tend to shut people out when we feel like we've kind of spiritually blown it.

[24 : 00] But don't you see what Samuel's saying here? He's saying, actually, God's using those people to extend his own message of faithfulness and mercy to you. Samuel was going to keep on praying for them and teach them and that would be a gift of God's continuing love to them.

the love that comes for his great namesake. You see, I think there's sort of a Copernican revolution that needs to happen in our spiritual life.

And when it happens, it does sort of two things that seem very strange and not related to one another at first. On the one hand, when this revolution happens, it brings the most complete humility and at the same time, it brings the most complete security.

And that shift, what that revolution is, is to realize that God does what he does, not ultimately, not ultimately for our sake, but for his sake.

And what I mean is this, God does what he does, not ultimately because he thinks I'm so great and he wants to make much of me. God does what he does because God himself is great and he wants to display that greatness for everyone to see and enjoy.

[25 : 34] And of course, that brings humility, doesn't it? Because finally, I realize, lo and behold, that I'm not the center of the universe. that it's not about me. But don't you see that it also brings security at the same time?

Because if it all depends on God and not actually on me, as humbling as that is, if it all depends on him, then there's no way that it could fail.

if the Lord says he's not going to forsake you for his great name's sake, there's no way you're going to be forsaken.

I was trying to come up with a good illustration of this and instead I came up with a measly illustration of it, but I'm going to give it to you anyway. So imagine there's this great magnet. When I was in middle school, my teacher had this sweet magnet that we always loved playing with. Imagine there's this massive, powerful, strong magnet and a little nail and you sort of let go of the nail and what does it do? It just wham right into the magnet. It doesn't go anywhere. Now imagine that that nail could sort of bend itself into all sorts of different shapes.

[26 : 52] Would that have any effect of the magnet's hold on that little nail? No. Imagine the nail could sort of change all colors. Imagine it paints itself red and blue and purple and green.

Does that change the fact that it's gripped tightly by that giant magnet? Of course not. Why? Because the thing that is keeping that little speck attached to that great thing surging with energy isn't the shape or the color or the history or the deeds of that nail, but the energy of that magnet. Friends, that's how it is with us in the Lord. It's because of who he is and the great energy of his glory and majesty and holiness and love that he's not going to forsake us.

no matter how bent or twisted you might think you are. Look at verse 24. Only fear the Lord and serve him faithfully with all your heart, for consider what great things he's done for you.

[28 : 12] Again, Samuel reissues this call. Come back to God. Fear the Lord. That is, live in all of him and not all these lesser things. Serve him faithfully with all your heart.

Sink your life into this one who alone can profit and deliver. Sink your life into this one who can bring true happiness and lasting freedom.

And then he adds this, verse 25, but if you still do wickedly, you shall be swept away, both you and your king.

Now what are we to make of that? Is Samuel suddenly sort of pulling the rug out of everything he just said? I thought the Lord wasn't going to forsake us because of his great name. Now it looks like we're going to get swept away because of our great wickedness if we don't obey.

What is going on? Is Samuel contradicting himself? Well friends, in order to understand this verse, we have to understand the story.

[29 : 23] We said earlier that Samuel was reaffirming the covenant between Israel and God in this chapter. And this last verse, verse 25, is actually an echo of a more ancient warning that was part of the covenant in Deuteronomy 28.

Deuteronomy 28 lists all these sort of ways in which the people of God will disintegrate and fall apart if they're not faithful to him. And the climax of all those covenant curses is exile.

That if people continue to reject God and choose other lords and kings, that people will be swept out of their land and taken captive by foreign nations. God will basically deconstruct the nation to the core and send it away.

And what Samuel is saying here at this moment in their history is that the appointment of the king doesn't change that warning. Of course the king is now going to have a big influence on the direction of the nation, but if the people continue to turn away from God, exile will still come and it will come both on you and your king.

One writer put it this way, Israel wanted a king to fight their battles, but no king will be able to defend them from God's judgment.

[30 : 43] That is, until one day, hundreds of years later, after all that Samuel had already said actually came true, the people had continued in their idolatry and wickedness, God had sent them away to exile, God had even brought back a group of survivors to begin living in the land again and they started rebuilding their sort of nationhood.

After all that, hundreds of years later, the king comes. And this king was unlike any that Israel had seen before.

He didn't spend most of his time with the people who looked like they had it all together spiritually speaking. He wasn't hanging out with the powerful and the very pristine and pure.

Shockingly, he spent most of his time with spiritual failures and misfits, the tax collectors and the prostitutes and the people who had seemingly blown it. That's where this king spent most of his time and that was the sort of people who gathered around him.

And that wasn't like any king they had seen before. And yet, this king was also different in another way. You see, all of Israel's kings, if you start reading the rest of the story, you know are deeply flawed.

[31 : 58] Next chapter, Saul is going to come crashing to the ground with a thud. And then David's going to appear and we're going to find that he's a man after God's own heart and yet he too is still deeply flawed.

But this king who comes so many years later is nothing like that. No matter how often his enemies try to trap him in his words, he always responds with the wisdom of God and the love of God. He's always without flaw, heeding God's law, keeping the covenant, loving those around him. Finally, here is actually a king and a true Israelite who does what God says and keeps the covenant.

Here he is. But then in the end, the greatest difference of all, though this king had lived under God's law perfectly, he's sentenced to death and rejected by the people, forsaken by the very people that he came to lead and to love.

And yet that's not actually the most shocking part of his death. God's law perfectly and he calls out to the people that he calls out to the God on an implement of Roman execution, a cross.

[33 : 10] He calls out, my God, my God, why have you forsaken me? He calls out to the God who says he'll never forsake his people.

And in this moment, God is silent and does not reply. And though he was the perfect son, the father forsakes him on the cross.

And you see, friends, when that happened, Jesus Christ was bringing to a climax and a resolution the greatest problem in all of history.

You see, the justice of God required that this covenant-breaking people be judged. And yet the steadfast love of God required that these same people never be forsaken.

How could he do both? How could this God of perfect justice and holiness and perfect love and faithfulness ever be in relationship with his people?

[34 : 19] How is it that God will not forsake those who deserve to be forsaken? Isn't that the tension that you feel when you actually blow it? That deep down you kind of know that you ought to be forsaken.

And yet God comes and says, I won't forsake you. How? Well, now you see how. Because Jesus Christ stood in our place and was forsaken so that we would never have to be.

You see, verse 25 forces us. It just pushes us to read the rest of the story. And when we keep reading, we follow it all the way to Jesus, the true king who was swept away for our wickedness.

But this was the one king who could actually save us from God's judgment. He was swept away for our wickedness so that we could be welcomed home by his righteousness. And that means, friends, we need not fear.

though we have sinned, we can turn again and serve the Lord with all our hearts. The Lord Jesus rose again on the third day as a demonstration that the entire debt of sin had been paid.

[35 : 35] That sin couldn't actually hold him because sin had been completely swallowed. every sin that you think has utterly blown it between you and God.

And friends, every sin that you're actually going to commend that you think will blow it between you and God, if you've placed your trust in him, has been dealt with through his death and resurrection. So tonight, if you've blown it, look to the cross and the resurrection of Jesus.

Turn and give him your heart and know that he'll not forsake you. Begin again tonight.

You know, if Samuel could tell Israel not to fear and to serve the Lord with all their heart, knowing what he knew of God's love and faithfulness then, how much more should that be true of us today? Knowing what we know now through Jesus. The full flowering of God's faithful love has come to be displayed through Christ.

[36 : 45] How much more can we say he'll not forsake us? How much more can we consider the great things that he's done? How much more ought we to serve the Lord with all our hearts?

Let's pray. Lord Jesus, it is right for our sin to feel weighty and grievous.

Lord, not just because of the consequences that it brings, but because of what it means about you, the way in which it dishonors you.

And yet, Lord, we hear such good gospel news in this passage that you won't forsake us. Lord, I pray for my friends here tonight who might be weighed down with a heavy load of sin and shame and regret.

Jesus, I pray that they would be looking to you and see in you the one who lifts their burdens and welcomes them home. Father, help us to live in the world as people who have found the one who will never forsake us and who is our true prophet and our true deliverance.

[38 : 02] Lord, in you that there is happiness and there is freedom forevermore. Help us to live that way by your spirit, Father, we pray. Amen. Well, friends, we're going to close by singing one more song.

And let's sing this song together as a way of praying and meditating.