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Title: *Hidden Hurts #5 - Shame and Regret*

Scripture: 2 Samuel 11

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So, I want you to imagine with me for a moment that the news breaks of a scandal. The scandal is in the military where a general who's been deployed with his troops and some of their families overseas have been engaged in a conflict that has come under scrutiny. The scrutiny is because at one point when all of his officers were out conducting a military campaign and all the families were around the base, he stayed at the base and hit on one of his officer's wives. Whether she felt constrained or whether she was a willing participant, she indulged with him in a liaison and became pregnant.

But that wasn't really the scandal if it had ended there. What happened was he didn't want to be discovered. So, he called this officer back from the military campaign that he was engaged in, and he hoped that he would go into his wife. So that when he was there, she would conceive or perceive to be conceiving and that everything would be covered up.

But the officer felt like it would be morally wrong for him to spend a night with his wife while his troops were out engaged in battle. So, he stayed in the barracks and the next night the general said, basically, I'm going to try to get him drunk so that he'll go back to his home. And again, he stayed in his barracks, The general, a little confused, decided that his only course of action was to put this man at the very front of the battle. So, he sent him back and sent his brigade into the thick of the battle where he died. And now this is all known, it's coming out, and it's splashed all over the media.

Well, this isn't really an event that's happened, but there's a story in David's life that's similar, except it isn't just splashed around the media. It's something that has been contained for over 2000 years in our Bible to tell us David's worst moment. That is the moment when he not only slept with Bathsheba, but he arranged to have her husband killed so that no one would know.

Here's what we read in 2 Samuel 11, verse one, and following. It says, "In the spring, at the time when the Kings go off to war, David sent Joab out with the King's men and the whole Israelite army. They destroyed the Ammonites and besieged Raba. But David remained in Jerusalem." So evidently part of what happened in that culture was that in the spring the neighboring countries that had disputes would have battles, and David had so much success he sent his army out, but he stayed in Jerusalem.

In verse 2, "One evening, David got up from his bed and walked around on the roof of the palace. From the roof, he saw a woman bathing. The woman was very beautiful. David sent someone to find out about her. The man said she is Bathsheba, the daughter of William, the wife of Uriah the Hittite. Then David sent messengers to get her. She came to him and slept with him, and he slept with her. Now she was purifying herself from her monthly uncleanness. Then she went back home. The woman conceived and sent word to David saying, I am pregnant." So now David has this crisis. And if you read through Samuel 11, what you see is this interplay of David trying to get her husband, Uriah, to come and to go to her so that his indiscretion could be covered up, but he doesn't.

David has Uriah take the note that basically seals his death back to the front. That puts him in the front and the soldiers withdraw and he's killed. And it seems at first as if David has gotten away with it. That this is going to work. So, he takes Bathsheba to be his wife. But then Nathan comes on the scene.

2 Samuel 12, says this, "The Lord sent Nathan to David. And when he came to him, he said there were two men in a certain town, one rich and the other poor. The rich man had a very large number of sheep and cattle, but the poor man had nothing except one little ewe lamb that he had bought. He raised it and it grew up with him and his children. And he shared its food and drink from his cup and even slept in his arms. He was like a daughter to him. Now a traveler came to the rich man, but the rich man refrained from taking one of his own sheep or cattle to prepare a meal for the traveler who had come to him. Instead, he took the ewe lamb that belonged to the poor man, and he prepared it for the one who had come to him."

It says, "David burned with anger against the man and said to Nathan, as surely as the Lord lives, the man who did this must die. He must pay for the lamb four times over because he did such a thing and had no pity. And Nathan said to David that you are the man." I don't think it was like, "You're the man!" I think this was "YOU ARE THAT MAN!" And what happens next is David, all of a sudden, understands what he had done. David's out of control appetite for his sexuality, which was seen in his multiple wives and in his concubines, now has come to fruition where he couldn't be restrained. So, he acted on something and when he was found out, he was angry.

By the way, often when people are angry at somebody else's issue, it might mask their own issue. Now Nathan confronts him and what we read in verse ten is this, "Now, therefore, the sword will never depart from your house." This is Nathan, "because you despised me and took the wife of Uriah the Hittite to be your own." So, David's life never changes. His family goes into turmoil because of this decision. And in fact, probably whether you're a person who knows a lot about the Bible or not, the

story of David and Bathsheba is something that is part of our cultural folklore. David is synonymous with Bathsheba and with this incident in his life. And so now the question becomes, what does he do with this?

And we're going to talk about shame, guilt, and regret a little bit. So just a word about these words. I think guilt comes from doing wrong, something that, you know, is morally wrong. Maybe it's something as spectacular as what David did. Maybe it's something that is seemingly more mundane, like just losing your temper and saying something that isn't kind or isn't true. Maybe it's something like drinking to the point of just numbing your pain on such a repeated basis that you do damage to your family. Maybe it's gossip or slander, or you say something to tear down the fabric of somebody else's life. But whatever it is, it's something that you say, "I probably shouldn't have done that."

Wherever you get your sense of morality, whether it's from the Bible or somewhere else, you realize that this is not in accordance with my own values even. Shame comes when you can't really deal or resolve your guilt. It starts this process of saying I'm bad, I'm not worthy. Regret is, in my mind, often tied to that. But it's different in this sense, that sometimes regret has no moral underpinning. This is an I regret that I didn't go fishing more with my brother the year before he died kind of a thing.

Today we're going to focus more on guilt and shame. When there was something moral where we said I blew it, it wasn't what I wanted to do, or it wasn't my best moment. It's not that regret doesn't come from that, but regret we can handle by learning our lessons and trusting that God's hand is often engaged in bringing about good out of situations that we choose badly.

But today I want us to learn something about how to deal with our shame and regret. The word that I want to use is a word that is often ignored in churches, even Christian churches. That is the word repentance because this is the path that David took. Although this did not erase the consequences of his decision, this didn't make everything better, but it put him in a right standing again with God.

We see this in Psalm 51, and Psalm 51 has this title at the beginning. Here's what it says, this is how you know that this is tied to the story in 2 Samuel 11 and 12. It says "for the director of music, a psalm of David, when the Prophet Nathan came to him after David had committed adultery with Bathsheba." Now how would you like that? Kept for 2000 years and people reading about it forever. And that is what David has. But here is his prayer.

Now, I would guess that even as I've started to talk about this, that there are some different reactions as we're responding to this. Some of us think I don't really need to repent of much. I haven't had to really repent in a long time. In fact, some of us never think we do anything wrong. If that's you, can I just say that probably means that you're living in denial and self-righteousness. What that means is not that you've become so perfect in sanctification or understanding of God's ways. Sanctification is just a word that means becoming like God, like Jesus set apart for God. But what it means is that in part, you're not seeing the beauty of God, but you're saying, I have to feel good about myself.

Some of us maybe feel a sense of guilt all the time, and we constantly, even after we go to God, feel a sense of guilt. That probably is a non-recognition of the work of Jesus. That's at the core level where we still feel like we somehow have to earn something with God.

Then some of us probably say, well, all guilt is false guilt. Therefore, I need to get rid of guilt. And this is both a secular and a Christian answer. In some ways, the secular answer to this says you should never feel bad about anything. You just be you; you be happy with yourself. And whatever you've done, you've done. The problem with that is, when you've done something that you know is egregious, you can't just tell yourself, okay, I'm good, it's all good, and move forward.

Sometimes the Christian version of this is saying, look, I get forgiveness and God is just a great God of grace in such a way that I should never feel guilt at all. But in the New Testament, the work of the Holy Spirit, John 16, is in part to bring about conviction from sin. So, if you never feel guilt or you push all guilt out of your life, what you're in part doing is you're saying, I don't need the Holy Spirit to show me where something isn't in accordance with the work of God in my life.

So, with that, here are three elements of repentance that we see in Psalm 51. The first, I'm just going to say, is having confidence in God's character or God's mercy. Verse 1, "Have mercy on me. Oh God. According to your unfailing love, according to your great compassion, blot out my transgressions." So, what David does, very simply, is when he recognizes that he is this man he comes to God, he says, God, you're a God of mercy. You're a God of compassion. You're a God whose character leads me to believe that I can come to you with my brokenness, my sin, and with my worst moments.

Here's what some of us probably do when we recognize our worst moments. If we even recognize and acknowledge them, what a lot of us will do or say is, well, I'll come to God, but let me do some things first to right myself so that when I come to

God, I'm not coming in really pleading on his mercy, but at least I can come and say, I cleaned it up a little bit. Like it's not as bad as it was over here. I'm better now than I was here. And what we're still trying to do is, not come to God on the basis of his character and mercy, but come to God on the basis of our merit and what we've done that has somehow commended us to God.

The message of Christianity ultimately is that we don't come to God on our merits. We come to God on the merits of Jesus Christ, what Jesus has done on our behalf, on the cross. Therefore, we need to come with a sense of saying this is God's mercy that I come and I can plead to. If you say, well, I can't bring what I've done to God until I clean up something a little bit or I can't bring it to God because it's so egregious, what you're in essence doing is you're saying to Jesus, I know that you died on the cross for everyone else's sin, but my sin is too big. That misses the character of God in your life. God is a God of mercy. And for David, there was a moment of saying, God, I come to you. Have mercy on me because of your loving kindness, because of your compassion in my life.

You know, as kids, when we're growing up, some of us had great moms, great dads who invested in us, and loved us. Some of us did not. Some of us had grandparents who filled that mode, or maybe an uncle and a teacher. But most of us somewhere had somebody who wanted our best. But it was hard to believe it until maybe we get to a point where we have our own kids and we realize how much we are for them. And the idea, in a sense here, is that God's mercy and compassion are like somebody who cares for and wants our best, which no human love can even replicate. But the experience is one that when we say I have experienced at least either the feeling of somebody being for me or being so for one of my own kids, then I know how God sees me, and I can come to him because I have confidence in his mercy and his grace.

There's a second thing here, and I'm just going to say that this is the courage to come clean. And this is in verses 2-4 of Psalm 51. This is a much harder part of repentance because there's a part of us that likes to manage our image. We like to manage our image certainly for others. But the truth is we like to manage our image for ourselves, maybe even more than for others. In other words, we want to feel good about how we do things, we don't even want to sometimes admit to ourselves that we've made a moral blunder, and we want to manage our image to God. What we try to do often is avoid the issue. We do it by minimizing what we've done wrong, by covering what we've been doing wrong, and by spinning what we've done wrong. And what we're doing, in essence, is we're practicing narrative control.

This is where we say, well, I didn't really make a mistake like that, or I didn't really do that, or I did it because of you and then we blame it on somebody else. Instead of

saying, yeah, I did that and I don't have any good excuse or any good reason. Sometimes one of the great ironies of coming clean is that even after somebody comes clean, they end up resenting the people to whom they've come clean because once the narrative is out there, I don't like that you know that about me.

But one of the evidences of coming clean is that you don't care. You don't care what the consequences are because you're able to say, this was what I did. Now, that doesn't mean that you must share every moment with everybody. I think the appropriate level of sharing a moment is the people who are involved in it. So, you don't have to come clean to people who had nothing to do with it. But coming clean means that we come to God, to ourselves, and to the relevant people in our lives and say, this is what happened and this is part of the work of the Holy Spirit.

Here's where we see this again. Psalm 51, "Wash away all my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin. For I know my transgression and my sin is always before me. Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight; and you are right in your verdict and justified when you judge."

So, here's what David does. He says, I have sinned and he uses three words for sin here. And you may when you read this, just think, well, this is poetic. He's saying there's sin, there's iniquity, and there's transgression. Don't these all mean basically the same thing? And there's some truth to that. But I think there's probably some shade of meaning here.

And the reason this is significant is I think what David was doing by saying sin, transgression, and iniquity, was painting a picture of his entire experience. I think he was getting specific in a way here because what he was doing was not just simply saying, oh, yeah, I sinned, God forgive me. You see, sometimes the way that we come clean is we try to come clean with a very general admission, rather than something very specific, and you know, relationally how poorly this works.

This last week I had an afternoon/evening where I was not an ideal husband. As that played out in our marriage, I decided it was time to apologize. So, I did the general apology, which was something along the lines of, well, if that bothered you, I'm sorry. That did not land well because when we're offended, what we want is somebody to say, here's what I did. Not I'm sorry you're bothered by it. And so, what we need is to be very specific. That's what David was doing.

Sin is the Hebrew word "*Khata*." It means to miss the mark. Transgression is the Hebrew word "*Pesha*." It means to be rebellious. And iniquity is the Hebrew word

"Avon." It means to be twisted or perverted. Now, yeah, that's a lot. So let me try to make this really simple here in this sense.

Here's the nuance. If you're driving somewhere and your GPS says, go out and around and go here. You look at a map and you say, but there's a road that just cuts right here, why didn't the GPS take me on that? I'm going to take this road. This looks like a great road. You get on the road and you're driving down the road and there's an obnoxiously low speed limit that says 25 miles an hour. You're just there driving at a really slow pace. Now maybe you say, well, 35 won't hurt anything. 40 seems like it's not hurting anybody. When you get up a little farther, you come around a bend, and you realize that you come to these buildings that are a home for kids with physical challenges, kids who can't see, kids who can't walk. They all have access to this road that you were driving down well past the speed limit. Well, in that moment, what you recognize is, this Hebrew concept of sin or "*Khata*" which is saying, I missed the mark, I came up short. I probably should have followed the speed limit. Oops, that was my mistake.

A transgression, the "*Pesha*" is rebellion. This is the next time you're driving down there, you say, Hey, I'm late. I remember this shortcut. I'm going to turn down this road and I'm going to drive 45 because I can and nothing bad happened. I'm going to get there sooner. "*Avon*" is this twisted, this iniquity, this perversion when you and your friend think that it's really fun to drag race on the road.

Okay. Now, that's a goofy way to think about it, other than this. That is what I think David was doing, he was saying when I walked around on the roof, I sinned. I looked and I shouldn't have kept looking, but I kept looking and I wanted. Then what I did is I rebelled. I said, I must have her. I know that she's with somebody else, but I don't care right now. And then he twisted it, perverted it by saying, I'm going to have her husband killed so that nobody knows what happened. What coming clean means is that we come and name what it is that we've done so that we are able to say, "God, I don't care who knows or what it costs, but I'm willing to come clean."

One author said this. He said, "Our drug of choice right now is knowing who we're better than. Some of us, the way that we avoid coming clean is we say to ourselves, you know, I may have done something that wasn't bad, but compared to that person, I didn't do nearly as poorly. The same author said this. He said, "Sometimes God allows us to sin spectacularly so that we will know how spectacular God's grace is."

See, coming clean allows us to come to a point where we say, "God, you are good and you are full of grace and mercy." But notice again here in verse 4 where he says, "You're right in your verdict and justified when you judge God." Whatever the

consequence, I accept it. That's part of coming clean, that we're not trying to control, spin, or minimize whatever it is that comes from what has happened.

Then there's a third element, and this is in verses 10-13. I'm just simply going to say this is a commitment to God's ways. Part of repentance is a commitment to say, I'm going to turn and go a different direction. I'm going to live and make my life in alignment with the ways of God.

Again, you understand this from our human relationships. If somebody says I'm sorry and you know that there's no intention of a change, then this sorry is shallow. And if you come to God and say, God, I'm going to do this because I know you'll forgive me, then that asking for forgiveness is shallow. What you're doing is not actually asking for forgiveness. You're asking for absolution. Here's how we see this in verse 10, "Create in me a pure heart, Oh God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me. Do not cast me from your presence or take your Holy Spirit from me. Restore to me the joy of your salvation and grant me a willing spirit to sustain me. Then I will teach transgressors your ways, so that sinners will turn back to you."

What he does is he comes, and he says, God, create me a clean heart, in a heart that he didn't have. Now God is working because he's saying, God, this is what I want. And he says, take not your holy Spirit from me. And some of us may hear that and say, well, can the Holy Spirit ever be taken from a believer, a follower of Jesus? I think probably what David's doing here is he's referring to the experience of the Holy Spirit, not the presence. Maybe he's thinking back about Samson in the Old Testament and where Samson was living, and he didn't even recognize that the power of God or the Spirit of God had left Him, the power of what God wanted to do. But what he's saying is there's a sense in which I don't want to be without conviction about what is best and what is true. And then he says this, "Restore unto me the joy of your salvation."

You know, if you don't have joy in your Christian experience, if you don't find joy in worship, Bible study, prayer, church attendance, if it's just a list that you check off, it's possible that one of the reasons that's true is because there's unrepentant sin in your life that has caused you not to have joy. Because when the Spirit of God is at work in our lives, giving us freedom from guilt and shame, there is a joy that says this is something that only God can do.

If you're a person who's here and you say, you know what, I'm not sure about faith, about God, about religion. One of the reasons I don't like religion is I don't like any guilt. I don't want any shame. If religion causes me to feel bad about any choice that I make, then that's a negative. Can I just tell you that ultimately your only pathway to

joy is not through the absence of standards, but it's through knowing that the standards have been met, even the standards you yourself can never meet through Jesus Christ? That is where joy is found. That is the message of the cross and that is the beauty of what God does in our lives.

When I was 17 and had started driving, I remember one night going out, it was winter, taking the car and it was snowing and a little icy. And I remember my dad saying to me something along the lines of "Be careful because it's icy." In all my 17-year-old confidence, I was like, "I got this. Leave me alone, big guy. I know what I'm doing."

So, I take the family car out and I took a corner a little too fast. The car slid and hit another car. In those days, I'm old enough that I couldn't just call them on my cell phone. We had to pull into a place, get on a payphone, call the police, and call my dad. My mom and dad came. My mom dropped my dad off and he stayed until the police and everything were done with their incident report. The car was drivable, so it wasn't a horrendous accident. I remember as I was waiting for my dad to come that night, thinking through the way that I was going to handle it. This was conscious thinking in my mind. What was in my mind was, so do I tell the truth, that I lost a little control of the car and it slid ahead? Or do I say that the other car was across the line? There was snow, how would anyone ever know if the car was across the line or not? Maybe I should come up with a story about how there was a deer that ran across the road and that's what caused me to swerve, and it clearly wasn't my fault.

Do you see the human impulse? It's to say I'm not to blame. What was at stake when you're 17 is maybe my dad will take away the car, and maybe I'll lose my freedom. So, I'm having this debate. My dad got there and when he asked me what happened, I just simply said "Yeah, I was going too fast. The car slid out and I hit the other car." I'll never forget, my dad basically said, "Well, this is going to cost you and it's going to cost me." He let me pay the insurance deductibles. "Let me." And as we went to get in the car to go home, I went around to the passenger side, assuming that I wouldn't drive. My dad said, "What are you doing?" He said, "Here, come on over here. I want you to drive home now." I don't remember a lot of profound moments in my childhood, but I remember the confidence of my dad that day in me to say, you drive home and I'm not going to, in a sense, take this out on you.

Now, I would love to tell you that since that day I have always driven slowly, but I don't want to have to repent for lying later. But there is a commitment at some point to saying when my dad said, "Hey, take it easy," you know what? He might know something. Do you see the parallel? Come clean, trust in the mercy, but also say yeah, I may not know everything. When we come clean to God, then we are free to

experience the joy of our salvation in the presence of the Spirit in our lives and to be freed from ongoing shame and guilt.

You know, I don't know how you come here today, what your experience has been. I would guess that some of us who are here have some big stories. Some of us have done things that are as spectacular as what David did. For some of us, it's ancient history. It happened when we were in high school, in college, maybe 20 years ago. For some of us, there were things that happened this last week that we haven't come clean about yet or maybe there are things that are seemingly small, but we know the devastation that they're causing in our lives because we won't come clean and turn toward God.

The way that we gain freedom and joy is not in denial, not in simply saying all guilt is false guilt, or just declaring ourselves good, but saying I'm declared good because of what Jesus Christ has done, not because of what I do. When that becomes true, that's when we experience freedom from shame and guilt. It doesn't mean that it won't rear its head. It doesn't mean that we won't have to return to the process of coming clean. But it means that we will not be a slave to feelings of shame and guilt.

I'd like to just take a moment and ask you to bow your heads and close your eyes. I'm going to read Psalm 51:1-4 again, as a prayer. Then I'd like to lead us in a time just prompting us to turn toward God, to repent. "Be gracious to me. Oh God, according to your patient and enduring love, according to the greatness of your compassion, blot out my transgressions, wash me thoroughly from my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin. For I know my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me. Against you, you alone, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight."

Father, the truth about me and probably many of us, all of us in this room, is that we do choose sin and iniquity and rebellion. Sometimes we do it by choosing hatred; sometimes by choosing slander; sometimes in envy; sometimes in greed; sometimes in pettiness, lust, or use of pornography; sometimes in gossip or pride; sometimes in self-reliance or self-righteousness or self-aggrandizement; sometimes in dishonesty or unkind words. Sometimes in choosing to ignore the obvious needs around us, and sometimes in hoarding our resources. There are probably darker things than even we've acknowledged here.

But God, in this moment, I pray that you would draw us to yourself and that we would respond to whatever prompting of the Holy Spirit and release the guilt and the actions that can cause shame. God, I pray that you would not just convict us of specific individual sins that we turn from, but that you would also convict us of our need for your son, Jesus Christ, to be our Savior.

And then for those of us who have always thought that our way forward was just by claiming our goodness, doing our best was enough, that even today we would recognize that it is only because of Jesus that we can come to you, and we would come and acknowledge our sin and throw ourselves on the mercy of the cross and of the work of Jesus. And we pray this today, in Jesus' name, Amen.

Thanks for being here. Have a great week.