

**Date:** February 11-12, 2023

**Title:** *Hidden Hurts #6 - Loss of a Loved One*

**Scripture:** 2 Samuel 12

**Speaker:** George Palombo

Well, good morning, everyone. My name is George Palombo, I am on staff here as the care minister at Orchard Hill Church, if you don't know me. As you can see this morning, we are up against a very sobering message. We are in 2 Samuel 12, and we're looking this morning at verses 13 - 20. This is the account of David's loss of his child.

Let's just pray and jump right in this morning. Heavenly Father, I pray this morning that you provide for your people a theologically pure message to feed them. So that you would nourish our minds and our souls this morning. Lord, that I would be biblically faithful to your word and your people. Lastly, that this message applies practically to meet the needs of your people right where they are, right in this time and this space. We ask all these things in Christ's name.

While it's always good to get together, and perhaps when we are looking at something this tough, it's best to be together as God's people gathered in his name. I want to say right up front, this is such a tender, tender topic because what we're going to be doing this morning is trying to reconcile the holiness, justice, and the mercy of God with the human frailty of suffering, sin, pain, and grief.

I say that it's tender because I have personally walked through this with many of you. I have walked through the pain of a funeral or a memorial service for the one that you love. For some of you, it may be a little different for you. You are trying to minister to someone who may be going through the loss of a loved one. This can create some awkward moments for us. What to say to someone who's enduring the loss of a loved one? Our good intentions sometimes seem to create more pain than they give balm to the person we're ministering to. We might walk away wondering, why is this so incredibly difficult? We're going to see in this passage this morning that even David's men had to deal with this topic when David lost his son.

These encounters can be awkward for both the one grieving and the proposed consoler. We have a tendency sometimes to look at people who are grieving as though they have some sort of a condition. We may ask them questions like, "How are you?" While that might just even seem like a harmless and innocuous question to them, it may bring about in them this feeling of, "Oh, my goodness, I have to give some sort of an account again and go through some ledger of how I'm doing in my grieving process." Then sometimes in our good intentions, while they're doing that

and they're suffering through the way that they're responding, they can't even hear the words that are coming out of their own mouth because of their paralysis and grief.

But what we often do, as we're thinking in our heads is say, "I know a story like that happened to me or happened to somebody that I know. I'm going to share that with them in sympathy." What ends up happening is sometimes we multiply their grief because we're giving them another burden to carry. They help us to remember that everyone is on the outside of someone else's grief. We really cannot enter into the personal grief space of another person. No one processes or navigates grief and the loss of a loved one in some linear textbook fashion of shock, denial, guilt, bargaining, anger, depression, and acceptance in the same way. There's always a time element that's involved in it.

Then even one author asserts this and says, they said time would heal all wounds, but whoever they are, they lied. I know in this auditorium and online, there are people who are going through very fresh grief. Some of you may have recently lost a loved one.

I know that I officiated at a very dear friend's funeral from this congregation this past week. And then I officiated another funeral two nights ago for a stranger, that I didn't know. But, you know, the look of grief, hurt, and pain is the same. Whether it's somebody that we know or somebody that we don't know.

Perhaps you have recently gone through your first holiday or your first birthday without your loved one or some special momentous event. You're struggling to keep it under control and then somewhere seemingly out of the depths, out of nowhere, like a tornado that comes out of a bright, sunshiny day, you're hit like an avalanche of grief. It hits you from nowhere. Then we often re-experience a brand-new wave of pain, out of nowhere.

Or perhaps you've experienced guilt because maybe you have gone just a fraction too long without thinking about the person you lost, that one you loved. It may even seem like it causes more pain sometimes to go through the healing process. Maybe we betrayed our lost loved one by taking a moment and enjoying life for just a minute or 5 minutes.

I once heard a Christian author and speaker, Nancy Guthrie, as I was remembering going through some of my own grief, hearing her say some very applicable words. She said this after losing two of her own sons. She said, "The love you have for the person who died is not measured by a weight of deep and ongoing agony.

Sometimes we shackle ourselves to some standard of someone else's grief that we've watched them go through."

And may I break here for just a second? If you're going through any of these kinds of things, there is a beautiful ministry here at Orchard Hill Church called Grief Share. It meets every Thursday evening. And I've been to this. I've seen it live. And it's a group of people who come together and they share their experiences with one another, and they do it beautifully. And it's led wonderfully. So, you might want to go online and check it out if you or someone you know is going through this kind of process.

Some of you here may be preparing and bracing yourself for grief that is about to come on. Maybe hospice has been brought into your family, or the test results are in and they're a little more severe than first anticipated, or something showed up on the X-ray after an accident. You're preparing for that. Then there are some of us who are here and we are just completely far away from grief right now. We're sitting here in this auditorium and it's safe for us because everything is going swimmingly for us.

But here's one thing we can all be 100% certain of, we will all go through the pain and loss of someone. Because in this room, and we all know this, the mortality rate amongst human beings persists at 100%. I think to some degree we've been taught in our culture to just sort of handle it. We need to just get a grip on ourselves, put on some stoic face, and handle it because that's what Christians do. You know, we just put on a stiff upper lip, and we press on because that's what good faithful Christians do.

But we see in Scripture something very different. In one sense, this is the easiest of all the topics in this Hidden Hurt series to cover because it's universal, but in the other sense, it's the most difficult because it is the hardest one to reconcile. If you have been following along in this series called *Hidden Hurts*, we've been tracing the elements of the life of David in 1 & 2 Samuel. There is no way that we could cover all the ground in this message today about God's sovereignty and human suffering. I won't even try to do that. But if you ever want to have that conversation and feel a need to do so, please never be afraid to call your pastor.

Last week, Kurt, painfully but graciously, I believe, tackled the topic of repentance. It's a hard message to talk about repentance, and pastors don't typically win any popularity contests when they give a message on repentance. Sometimes God's word is just plain hard for us to digest and hear. But when God's Word is faithfully taught to us and we're given faithful instruction, we should be awed by the weight of God's Word. We are then given hope by the very remedy that's in the person of his son, Jesus Christ.

Kurt walked us through the very familiar and public sin of David. David took the wife of Uriah for himself, and he sent Uriah to his death in an effort to cover his own tracks. We walked through Psalm 51 looking at David's repentance and God's forgiveness of David's sin. David had, for over one year, been covering his tracks very carefully.

We're reminded in Hebrews 4:13 of some very sharp words: "Nothing in all of creation is hidden from God's sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of Him, to whom we must give an account." God's prophet squarely confronted David. David had been hiding his guilt and shame. God will never, ever be mocked. We remember last week that David owned the charge of "thou art the man." Scripture then gives us David's response to the prophet in straight and unambiguous terms. Those words rang deeply into David's heart. He said the words, "I have sinned against the Lord." He took full ownership of what was laid before him.

This morning, we're reading 2 Samuel 12:13. After David says, "I have sinned against the Lord." We read these words, and Nathan replied, "The Lord has taken away your sin. You are not going to die. But because by doing this, you have shown utter contempt for the Lord." In other words, God is saying to David, "David, you know, I've given you the throne of Israel. I've fulfilled the promise of Abraham in you. I've given you a people and heritage, and I've delivered your enemies right into your hands. But now, David, you have profaned my name before your adversaries." He goes on and says, "Now the son that is born to you will die." After Nathan had gone home. The Lord struck the child that Uriah's wife, had borne to David, and he became ill.

I need to stop here for a moment and address this very, very difficult issue right up front. I pray that you don't walk out of here. Because as a minister, there are verses inside of passages of Scripture that we simply wish just weren't there. I wish that every topic in Scripture were just easy to teach, or that we could just rewrite the story in our own way. It would read like this, Nathan says, "David, the Lord has taken away your sin and you're not going to die. Now you and Bathsheba can go and enjoy a wonderful honeymoon together." But that's not what we read.

There are words in sacred scripture, that we must contend with. Can you imagine being told by a prophet of God, a true prophet of God, the words that the Lord struck your child with an illness? I've heard stories and witnessed eulogies at funerals about unspeakable and unbearable tragedies, just like we heard Patti's story this morning. Children lost to the treachery of evil, of murder. I was a police officer once. I sat in so many trials and watched that. I've officiated funerals like that of evil, murder, and disease, and wondering how God could possibly be involved. They sat in these eulogies or in the tremendous suffering that they had to endure, only to hear people

say things like don't think that God was involved in this. God is never involved in disease. God is never involved in death. That is the territory of the enemy.

I know that these people are often trying to comfort the family. I know they're trying to protect God and hold back any resentment or bitterness toward God. But the families had endured this. To say things like God is not involved in suffering. God is not involved in death. If we believe, if we truly believe that God is not at all involved in our pain and suffering, we might as well just surrender our faith right up front.

The very greatest comfort that we have as believers is that he walks with us in our pain. That he is the great shepherd who walks with us through the valley of the shadow of death. That is the great hope of every believer. He is close by us, in the shadow of death. God is sovereignly involved in all things.

To say that God never sends illness is to ignore a very clear message in Scripture. But hear this, we have got to be very careful in addressing this issue. The Book of Job in its entirety warns us from ever assuming that there is a 1 to 1 correspondence between God's judgment and God's way in our lives and our sin. The fact is, there is not one of us that gets what we deserve from God. We can't jump to the conclusion that because a person contracts a certain fatal disease, they're guilty of a particular sin. The Bible completely and absolutely prohibits this.

But we must also never go to the other extreme and think that God never uses illness or disease or death as a discipline or a punishment. Here in this story, God clearly intervenes in the life of David and Bathsheba and takes the life of the child. This is not always the case.

Here's something else we need to be really clear about. This is not a judgment on the child. This child is going to be spared a lot of shame, the stain of the sin of David and Bathsheba. He will be spared from all the judgments in the future household of David that we watch play out in the later chapters of his life. It may even be seen as an act of mercy on God's part because this son will be spared the scorn of David's adversaries. David's life lives out almost like a live Jerry Springer show, and this child is going to be spared of this. He would not go on to be mocked by David's adversaries and by the tabloids that would be written about David. God is clearly mentioned as the actor in this drama.

David later says he will go to him, but his son will not return to him. The Lord struck the child that Uriah's wife bore to him. That's important for us to see in this passage. Up until this point, David's Bathsheba is never called David's wife. She was always called Uriah's wife because she did not belong to David. And David knew this. One

commentator notes something that might be offered for us as food for thought, both God and Uriah stand vindicated in this story. As difficult as it is to swallow. God's justice is maintained. His Holiness is maintained and Uriah is vindicated in this story.

Verse 16 is interesting because here's what we read - David pleaded with God for the child. He fasted and he spent the night lying in sackcloth on the ground. The elders of his household stood beside him to get him up from the ground, but he refused and he would not eat any food with them. Now, David pleaded with God for the child, even knowing that the judgment of God had already fallen, and he wasn't willing to accept it.

So, he goes on this prolonged fast. He lays down in prayer and wrestles with God with all his might. We don't know what he said, but we can imagine some things that David might have said in his agony. Things like, "God, this child is guilty of nothing. Please spare this child's life." Or he may have said something like, "God, Bathsheba is in agony over this. I know she's a player in this, but she really didn't have a choice. I'm the king. I am the one who brought her into this." He begs God, day and night, and fasts before the Lord.

Here is something, David knew what he deserved. David knew the law. David knew that he deserved to die. David didn't complain or appeal to God that God had no right to take the child. We never read that in Scripture or that his personal view of human life somehow superseded God's view of human life. David knew for certainty where life originated. He knew that all life originates and is sustained in the person of God himself. It's not that David had his hands in the air screaming out, "how could you do this? God, how could you do this wicked, wicked thing? How could you possibly be like this?" It was that David understood the character and the nature of God that he did know who is infinitely holy and infinitely just.

The Scriptures are clear to us in this. In Psalm 103:10, we read this, "God does not treat us as our sins deserve or repay us according to our iniquities." We love this verse and we experience it every single day. We wake up in the morning and we presume that because God didn't take us in the middle of the night that we're okay. We did pretty good. We're actually pretty good people because He didn't take us. And even if we're not pretty good, we're not so bad that we deserve that kind of treatment from God. When the fact is, this is from George Whitfield, one of the old Puritan ministers, he said, "If I had received what I deserved after breaking God's law in thought, in word, and in deed, I and my breaths would have been cast long ago into hell."

Charles Haddon Spurgeon once said these words. He said, "We ought to praise the Lord not only for what he has done on our behalf but what he has not done according

to what we truly deserve. He has not treated us as we deserve, and he has not ordered all things according to our disobedience." Job 11:6 points this out by reminding us that God exacts less from us than our iniquity deserves.

Now, David's sin was directly involved in his loss, but this isn't always the case. It's easy to look at David and say, "David, have you noticed what you did? You're not a great character. Murder, adultery, covetousness of your neighbor's wife, conspiracy to commit murder." This is pretty serious stuff. Here's the question, Chris Jamison alluded to this a couple of times in our worship this morning. Who could stand if our sin and judgment were on a 1 to 1 correspondence? When Romans 2:23, clearly states that all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God.

But here's the thing. Even in God's judgment, he is merciful. Even when he judges us, he is merciful in it, for he didn't exact the life of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, even though he had every righteous and just reason for doing so. He extended mercy in the Garden of Eden. He promised a redeemer in the Garden of Eden in Genesis 3:15. He did so through the seed of a woman.

Our hearts are often so little affected by the infinite mercy and patience of God with us. We can be so accustomed to hearing about God's grace and mercy that we have taken it for granted. What we really mean when we say God is good, is that God is nice and He should be nice like we are nice. But niceness is subjective. Our proposal of God who judges by niceness always depends on who we are in the story. Am I the defendant in the story? Am I the victim in the story? Am I the prosecutor in the story? Am I the defense counselor trying to make a name for myself in the story?

I remember as a police officer, I would transport inmates and I could hear the guys in the back seat saying things like, "Oh, man, you better hope you get Judge so-and-so because he's the nice judge. He's so kind and he's so merciful." And then I'd hear another guy go, "Man, you know, who you really want to avoid is Judge so-and-so. He's the hanging judge. He's the one that just brings the wrath and lays the law on the line."

David does something, he submits to the God that he does know. He submits himself to a God who is just, holy, and righteous because that is who God is all the time in his character. It is not based on some sort of arbitrary niceness from God. But David, if you remember, didn't appeal to God's niceness. Last week in Psalm 51, he appealed to something called God's loving-kindness. When he appealed to God's loving kindness, he said, have mercy on me. Oh, God. According to your loving-kindness, God. David was not talking about God's niceness. He was talking about a promise God made to his people. This was a covenant promise that David was leaning into for

forgiveness. He was leaning into the promised Redeemer all the way back in the Garden of Eden. The Messiah that was promised. That's who David had his hope in. And that's who we are called to have our hope. And today, as we look backward. David knew where his forgiveness was based on.

We often appeal to God because we believe we should have a nice God. Sometimes he's one that we can manipulate, or maybe he'll just get tired of hearing us. Maybe we'll just catch him off guard for a moment and he'll give in. But his justice and his holiness must always be maintained because that's his character. That's who he is in Scripture. That's who he is in reality.

17<sup>th</sup>-century pastor, scholar, theologian, and commentator John Gill writes, "The sting of death is sin, and that is a biblical principle. Death has a sting and that is sin. Sin is the cause of death. It is what has given rise and being to death. Death entered into the world by it, and death is supported in its empire through sin. It gives death its resistless power, which reaches all sorts of persons, young and old, rich and poor. It has no respect for people. And it is because of this that Christ has come and died on our behalf." That is the human story, that we are sinners and we forget that the weight of our sin really merits a judgment from God.

One theologian aptly stated this. He said, "He who thinks lightly of his sin will ultimately think very lightly of his savior." David submits to the God that he does know. He goes on in this story and it says that when the child dies, David gets up and he worships. That is really interesting because David, in his act of worship, is submitting to the God that he knows.

If you're here and you've never considered this kind of thinking process or you're angry at God for some tragedy or pain in your life, let me point out that there is a great chasm and a great difference between a God that we submit to and blind chances that we resign ourselves to. There is a Grand Canyon that sits between those two worldviews and philosophies. David submits to God and worships. He does not resign himself to chaos and meaningless submission.

One theologian notes this, submission is different than humanistic resignation to meaninglessness. To suggest that all things happen randomly and with no order to some hopeless end also gives no hope and no meaning. If the philosophy of meaninglessness was really the passion of a man, he would close his mouth and say nothing. If he really believed in this philosophy because every comment that left his mouth would be meaningless and he would know it. But yet, his desire is to drag everyone into his philosophy of meaninglessness and then teach it in every higher level of education, not only as though it had meaning, which is against his philosophy,



but as though this view of meaninglessness was worth all the marbles. And yet his entire thought system crumbles under the gravity of its own argument that everything is meaningless, including his argument. And it creates this circle of endless agony for both the proposer and the student.

What's the difference between these things? Between submission to God and resignation to chaos? We read in Scripture something very different for the Believer. We read, and we know that in all things, God works for the good of those who love him and who have been called according to his purposes. God's Word does not alleviate us of pain and suffering, but it puts things into perspective for us. God is working all things: disease, death, hurt, pain, calamity, earthquakes, famines, the things we've seen in Turkey and Syria. God is able to use all of those things to accomplish those things for his end. For our good.

What this does not mean is that these things in themselves are good because the Scriptures are very clear that we are not to call evil good and good evil. Woe to those who do that, says Isaiah. But that God is sovereignly and righteously overseeing all things for our very good to bring about the ends of his sovereign plan. David's response is one we would all do well to follow in submission to God. David's immediate response was to worship God borne out of his theology of what he knew about his God.

We don't read, after the death of that child that David felt the joy, joy, joy, joy down in his heart again, or that because of that trust that his emotions lined right up with his theology, or that his heart was filled with sunshine and rainbows all over again. Because he went and worshiped, David, trusted that the judge of all of the earth will do what is right, as we read in Genesis 18:25. He trusted not that his sorrow and great pain and tears would compel God to comfort him, but he trusted that God's promises would bring him God's peace in God's way. He would be sustained by God in his loss.

So, does the Lord understand the loss of a loved one? I want to just look at two things very briefly before we go. I once read an account of a mother who lost her only child, a son in an auto accident. The article discloses the 17-year-old model child and student who never gave his mom or dad any trouble was called out of life at a very young age. The mother, broken and so distraught, became bitter and totally resentful of God, and she cried out in soul anguish again and again. "Where are you, God? Where are you? My son needs you and I need you now."

The silence with no apparent answer drove her into a deeper abyss, total darkness. She found herself going into a recluse with an enormous gulf, separating herself from

the God that she once passionately loved, gave her life to, and served with joy since she was a child. I don't know about you, but I would be able to identify with that as a father.

But it didn't stop there. She had something else to say. After suffering in a dungeon of hatred and bitterness and not allowing anyone to talk to her about God or his grace, his goodness, or his mercy, she began to hate God and cried aloud. She bellowed, "I'm going to scream. Where were you when my son died?" Removed as she so often wanted to be, and being exhausted, she threw herself on her bed in hopeless, and utter despair. In the quiet, in the darkness, after a few moments, silence came over the bedroom and a loving voice spoke to her. "I was in the same place I was when my son died, right where I was when my son suffered. Firmly planted on my throne. Sovereign, working all things for the good of my people. Working it out in my son who never disobeyed me. I did this for you and for my son to make peace with me. Because I could never overlook the human frailty of sin."

Our sin and the gravity and weight of it are so often easily dismissed by us. You know, the Apostle Paul tells us in 1 Thessalonians 4 that we grieve and we grieve, but we don't grieve as those without hope. But it's not blind hope. It is a hope that is based on the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

You know, Jesus wept at the grave of Lazarus. The grave where he knew he was going to raise his friend five minutes later. Jesus looked around and he saw something. He saw what sin had done to his very creation, and it crushed his soul because he knew what sin did. When we look up to death, death is the problem of the human cry. When God looks down, he sees death to sin through the death of my sin is his reply. This all happens in the person of his son.

Before we go, if Jesus came simply to get rid of death, loss, hurt, pain, and suffering, do you know we would still be left with being able to live for 500 or a thousand, or 10,000 years? We would still be at odds with God. You know, when God placed the angel in the Garden of Eden and he said, no longer may you eat of the tree of Life. God was protecting us and He was creating a way to do something not about the death problem, but about the sin problem. This is what God has done on our behalf. He has done it fully and finally.

Which leads me, lastly, what do we do as believers? There was once a man who was a successful attorney and a real estate investor. He lost his fortune in the Great Chicago Fire of 1871, around the same time his beloved four-year-old son died of scarlet fever. He thought going on a vacation, would do his family some good. So, he sent his wife and daughters on a ship to England, planning to join them after he finished

some pressing business at home. However, while crossing the Atlantic Ocean, the ship was involved in a terrible collision, and it sank. More than 200 people lost their lives, including all of the man's four precious daughters. His wife alone survived the tragedy, and upon arrival in England, she sent a telegram to her husband that began. "Saved alone. What shall I do?"

The man immediately set sail for England. At one point during the voyage, the captain of the ship aware of that tragedy that struck the man's family summoned him to tell him they were now passing over the spot where the shipwreck had occurred, and he'd lost his daughters. As he prayed, he thought about his daughters. Words of comfort and hope filled his heart and his mind, and he wrote them down. And they have since become the words that we are about to pray as we leave.

Lord, when peace like a river attends our way, when sorrows like sea billows roll, whatever my lot, you've taught us to say it is well, it is well with our soul. Though Satan should buffet, though trials should come, this blessed assurance be with us in control, that Christ has regarded our helpless estate and has shed His own blood for our souls. My sin holds the bliss of this glorious thought. My sin, not in part, but in whole. It was nailed at the cross and I bear it no more. Bless the Lord. Bless the Lord. Oh, my soul. It is well, it is well with my soul. May the grace and peace of Almighty God, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit be with each and every one of you as we leave this place. May God bless you and his son. Have a great afternoon.