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Title: *Hidden Hurts #2 - Loneliness*

Scripture: 1 Samuel 27; 2 Samuel 6

Speaker: Dr. Kurt Bjorklund

We are in week two of a series that we've called *Hidden Hurts*. And what we're doing is we're looking at some accounts in the life of David. David, as an Old Testament figure, was one of the kings of Israel from a period that was known as the United Kingdom. You had Saul, David, and Solomon, three kings, and then the kingdom splits into Judah and Israel, all kinds of kings.

So, when you read your Old Testament in the Book of Kings, you get this weird king name and this weird king name, and that's the divided kingdom. This is before that. What we're doing very simply is taking some of the accounts from David's life that either David experienced or people in his life experienced, and talking about some of the hurts that happened then and happen now in your life and my life.

And is our desire not to try to say we need to be like these people and how they responded, but to identify with the experience and then say, where is God in the experience for each of us? And so that's what we're doing. And today we're talking about loneliness.

Here's what Mother Teresa said about loneliness. She said, "The most terrible poverty is loneliness and the feeling of being unloved."

Jodi Picoult, an author, put it this way. "If you meet a loner, no matter what they tell you, it's not because they enjoy solitude. It's because they've tried to blend into the world before, and people continue to disappoint them." Then Fiona Apple put it this way, "When you are surrounded by all these people, it can be lonelier than when you're by yourself. You can be in a huge crowd but if you feel like you can't trust anyone or talk to anyone, you feel like you're all alone."

So, what I'd like to do today is just talk about the experience of loneliness and then some of the ways that we can respond to loneliness. Now, David had loneliness probably several different times in his life. Probably one of the first is when he was running from Saul.

Saul was the first king of Israel, then David was the second king. But what happened was David was anointed to become king before Saul was gone. And so, what you have is you have Saul, in essence, saying, I don't want you to become king, I'm king.

And so, he's chasing him, trying to kill him. And David spends some years running, some years on his own, where his experience is really one of aloneness.

Here's what he writes in Psalm 13. David also gave us many of our Psalms, and we don't know for sure that this was written in this period, but it was certainly an experience of aloneness. Here's what he said. Psalm 13:2, "How long must I wrestle with my thoughts and day after day have sorrow in my heart? How long will my enemy triumph over me?"

And so, what was happening for David, at least at this moment, was he was wrestling internally with his thoughts. He was living, in a sense of saying, I'm oppressed, I'm alone. My experience right now and this is a cry out to God is one of desperation. Maybe you felt that at one time or another, and it doesn't have to be like the story we just heard where you lost someone and now, you're alone. Certainly, that may add to that experience, but you can be married and feel alone. You can be with siblings or parents and feel alone. You can be with friends and feel alone.

David, even though he had some aloneness, was also surrounded by people when he felt alone. First Samuel, chapter 27, he fled to the Philistines, which were an enemy of Israel. Here's what he says or the text says, "But David thought to himself..." Now, hear that wording again. He thought to himself. "One of these days I will be destroyed by the hand of Saul. The best thing I can do is to escape to the land of the Philistines. Then Saul will give up searching for me anywhere in Israel, and I will slip out of his hand."

Now, this was contrary to the promise of God, and so his experience, even though he had all these men who came with him to the Philistines, was very alone. And his reasoning became flawed in a sense, where he was saying, I can't trust God because of his experience of aloneness.

And then one more incident. This is in second Samuel six, where David is part of a procession that's bringing the Ark of the Covenant into Jerusalem. And if you were here last week, we talked in second Samuel seven about his desire to build the temple. This is what precedes it. He's bringing the ark into Jerusalem. It's a moment of celebration because this has been out of Israeli control.

Here's what we see, verse 20 and the following. "When David returned home to bless his household, Michal daughter of Saul came out to meet him." This is one of his wives. He had six wives. That's a message for another weekend. She came out to meet him and said, "How the king of Israel has distinguished himself today, going

around half-naked in full view of the slave girls of his servants as any vulgar fellow would!"

David said to Michal, "It was before the LORD, who chose me rather than your father or anyone from his house when he appointed me ruler over the LORD's people Israel—I will celebrate before the LORD. I will become even more undignified than this, and I will be humiliated in my own eyes. But by these slave girls you spoke of, I will be held in honor."

So, he says, basically, look, my toga may be falling half off, but I'm having a good time dancing in front of the Lord right now. And the slave girls, they like it. That's a loose translation. What he's basically doing here is he's saying, you don't have to value what I value but right now, at this moment, I am valuing dancing and celebrating God and what God is doing rather than what you think is important.

And here's what was true. David was married and his wife didn't value what he valued. In all likelihood, he felt very alone at that moment, at least from his wife, he felt unknown, unseen.

In some ways, loneliness is certainly something that doesn't just happen in biblical times. There have been a lot of articles in research that have come out in the last few years about loneliness. If you go all the way back to 1990, Robert Putnam wrote a book called *Bowling Alone* in which he said loneliness is becoming a bigger and bigger deal. And that's some 30 years ago.

But just this last year, The New York Times came out with an article that said, "Why is it so hard for men to make friends?" And what they concluded was that 15% of men say that they have no close friends and that that number has increased by five times since 1990. One-fifth of millennials, according to a podcast called Plain English, say they have no friends.

Our student ministry did a podcast on our Perspectives Feed, our Orchard Hill Plus, this last week about loneliness and teenagers. And one of the things they said was that people between ages 16 to 24, 40% of teens would say that they're lonely. And according to some data, what's happened is the average American has gone from spending 40 hours alone in a typical week to spending over 50 hours alone in a typical week from 2003 to 2013 and has fewer friends than they did before.

And then when you add into it what we've lived through in the last couple of years, where people were told that it was unsafe to be in public, they were left to say, I need to be where I am and work from home. There's a sense in which we've lost casual connections and even in often cases, family and deep connections.

And so, the feeling of aloneness is significant among many people in our culture. What's happened to many people in the increased time that they spend alone, what do they do with that time according to most research, we watch more TV. That's what we do. And there's been a change even in how we watch TV.

This is where I'm going to do the old guy thing like when I was younger and first married, the way that you watched TV is you had one TV in the house and so you decided together what you would watch and you would watch it together at an appointed time. I'm so old, there wasn't even a DVR, okay?

And so, you would watch it at an appointed time, and then you would go to work the next day and you talk to people who had watched the same thing at the same time. Now, what do we do is five of us sit in a house all with our own screens and watch our own thing, and we wonder why we feel alone, even with something that simple.

Let me just draw you a couple of pictures or give you some visuals for this experience of aloneness or loneliness. And this comes partly from David and partly from other ways of thinking about this. The first is a classic Venn diagram. The Venn diagram has three circles with the little part in the middle where there's an intersection.

And what I would say, even based on David's life, is that feeling, loneliness, in part is a factor when we experience something missing in one of these three circles. That is when we share life, values, and passions, then we feel known. We feel like we are not alone. But you take any of these away and what happens is all of a sudden, we feel the sting of loneliness.

Think about David. When he was on the run from Saul, he didn't have, in a sense, a shared life because he was all alone even if somebody shared his values or his passions. When he went over to the Philistines and he said to himself, now, one day I'm going to die at the hand of Saul. He felt like nobody had his shared values and certainly, with Michal and the dancing before the ark, she did not share his passions.

And so, you take any of these parts of being known away and we feel alone. Now, clearly, that doesn't mean that you share every passion with every person who you feel a connection with. I have a passion for NBA basketball. My wife does not share it. She has a passion for Masterpiece Theater. I do not share it. We watch things on our own screens at night when we're together. It's part of what happens. It doesn't mean that you don't have, but some of your passions have to be known or shared or you feel alone. Some of your values, most of your values, and sharing life. And if that doesn't happen, you feel alone.

But there's another way to think about this. And this is just your classic two-by-two chart if you think about it. On one side, there's being known and on the other side being unknown and then there's being accepted and rejected. So obviously when you're known and accepted, you feel loved and celebrated. It's one of the best feelings in this world. When somebody sees us at our best and our worst, they know who we are and they say, I accept you. I love you as you are. It's one of the best gifts we can receive.

But then sometimes what happens is we're unknown. And when this happens, we feel like this is probably fake love or hypocrisy. And granted, this is better than not being accepted. This is the person who doesn't know you. And they're like, you're awesome. You're amazing.

Now, of course, you'd rather have people who don't know you tell you you're amazing than not. But there's a little piece of you that when you hear that, you're like, but you don't know me. How do you know I'm amazing? You just tell me I'm amazing. And you don't actually know. And so, this is a little bit of a fake love or a fake something around this hypocrisy.

Now, when we're known and rejected this is painful because this is when somebody has seen our value, seen our passion, and shared life with us, and they say not so much. This hurts. And this is when we feel alone. When we experience the hurt or the pain of this experience.

And here, we just feel either kind of irrelevant or invisible when we're unknown and rejected. It doesn't hurt as much as being known because you say, well, you don't even know me, but there's still something that feels like it's missing.

Now, one thing that's also true is that if you were to take the increase in teen depression, teen anxiety, and even self-harm rates and overlay it with the increase in loneliness, statistically what you would find is that they're almost a mirror image of one another.

This is not something that is just a simple solution. This is something that's happening in our culture. And my guess is that many of us married, have lots of friends, unmarried, not a lot of friends, remote work, in-person work has felt the sting of this at one time, in one way or another, in our life.

In one study done by Harvard Gazette, they did an 80-year study. Imagine that, 80 years. And they found that the number one predictor of long life when you're age 50

is the quality of your social relationships at age 50, more than any other single factor. That's the one that tended to project long life. So, you can eat kale three meals a day, but if you don't have good social relationships, it won't do you much good, according to Harvard.

When you think about all of this, the other part that I would say is significant is we have different kinds of friends at different seasons of our life. Again, back to David. You could say that David had three notable friendships in his life. If you read through first and second Samuel, what you find is that he had Samuel at the beginning of his life who believed in him. And so, in one way you could say this was a champion for him in the middle of his life.

He had Jonathan and Jonathan did life with him. He was a companion. And then toward the end of his life, he had Nathan, who was the prophet, who we'll learn more about in the coming weeks. And Nathan was the one who was willing to challenge him. So, he had Samuel who was a champion for him. He had somebody who was a companion, which was Jonathan in the middle of life. And then toward the end of his life, he had Nathan to challenge him.

I don't think it's completely irrelevant that these were at different phases of life, because what we need, especially when we're young, is we need some people who say, I see you and I believe in you and I know what you can be.

Sometimes will have a parent who will do this for us. Maybe it'll be a coach, maybe it'll be a volunteer who leads a small group at church. Maybe it'll be a band instructor or a teacher, but somebody who believes in us and says, I see what you can be. And then for a lot of our lives, we just need companions. But also, as we mature in age, need some people who will challenge us and tell us the things that we don't necessarily see or understand.

So, what we experience maybe sometimes in loneliness is saying, well, right now I don't have this, or I don't have this, and so we feel that sense of loneliness even when we have people in our lives.

So now the question is, okay, if you have experienced loneliness, what do you do with it? Well, one answer that many people have is to decide that they don't need people. And this goes something like this. And that is, you know what, if that group of people isn't going to be friends to me or if this isn't going to work out, we just decide that it's time to retreat and that we can get by without really meeting people.

But you know what the problem with that is? It's not how you and I were created. If you go back to the beginning of Genesis one and two, when God was creating, the repeated phrase, and any time you're trying to interpret a passage of Scripture, something that's repeated gives you a good indication of what it's driving at.

What happens is, God created, and so it says He created this, he created that, he did this, and then every time it says, it was good and it was good and it was good and it was good. And do you know what the first time is that it says it wasn't good? It's when it says then he made Adam and he was alone and it was not good.

Now, sometimes people hear that and they say, well, maybe that's an indication of the priority of marriage in the Bible. And there's some of that. But I actually think this is driving more at the priority of relationships, the fact that you and I, we're not created to live life alone. We were created for relationships. God exists as a trinity. He created people to exist in relationships.

And so, whenever you or I start to say, I don't need people, part of what we're doing is we're going against how God created us. Your loneliness is a cry to say, God put something in me that wants to be known, wants to be loved, that wants to share life and values and passion with people in my world.

Now, the second thing that some of us will do if we say, okay, I realize saying I don't need anybody isn't healthy is we'll decide that what we need to do is we need to try harder at relationships. And that is a mixed bag. And the reason I say it's a mixed bag is there's a positive side to that, but there's also a negative side.

And here's the positive side. The positive side is it's better to say let me invest in relationships than it is to say, let me not invest in relationships. It's better to say let me be vulnerable than it is to say, let me not share anything about myself. But the problem is that sometimes you'll put yourself out there, you'll pursue something, and sometimes people won't reciprocate the way that you want.

You'll invite somebody to dinner and then they don't invite you. You'll call somebody, text somebody, and they give you less back or they just ghost you and you say, that hurt. I put myself out there. And certainly, it's important to understand that sometimes people are in different phases of life, and it isn't that they're rejecting you personally, it's just that their lives are already full and so maybe they aren't like personally saying, I don't want to connect with you, but they just don't have space in their lives. I think there are some natural progressions over time, but simply trying harder can be good, but it can also lead to more hurt.

So, I'd like to suggest that the best answer is to actually accept the reality of what is and embrace it. And here's what I mean. In Proverbs, chapter 14, verse ten, we read something that when I read it, you're not going to think is encouraging, but let me read it and then talk about it for a moment. Proverbs 14, verse ten says, "Each heart knows its own bitterness, and no one else can share its joy."

Now, here's why I say that's not encouraging. Do you know what that's saying? Nobody knows the depth of your heart, and nobody can completely enter into your happiness. Now, you're probably saying, well, wait a second, I thought this was to address my loneliness. And now you're telling me that nobody can really walk with me in the depth of my heart or at the heights of my joy?

Well, the reason that I want to point this out is that if our solution is always horizontal, meaning we're always saying, I'm looking to other people to meet my needs, then what will happen is we will load into human relationships a weight that it wasn't intended to carry.

I would even suggest that when Michal said, David, you're being undignified, the part of what she was doing was she's saying, what I want is somebody to give me social standing. I want somebody to make all those girls who are part of the culture feel good about me and my position. And so, you need to help me have this. And what she was doing, was she was loading into her relationships, all of this weight of saying, this is what I need from you.

If we can embrace what is, which is saying, there is no one person, there's no spouse, there's no friend, there's no companion along our journey that will give us everything we need. It will actually help us in this journey.

We get a little clue about how God works in this. Here's where we get the clue. I read a verse from Psalm 13 earlier, which is where David basically acknowledged his loneliness. The ESV in verse two says, "How long must I wrestle with my soul? How long must I endure this hardship?"

And then here's what we read later in the psalm. This is verses five and six. It says, "But I trust in your unfailing love." So, now he's had his experience of loneliness. And now he turns and he says, "But I trust in your unfailing love; my heart rejoices in your salvation. I will sing the LORD's praise, for he has been good to me." Here's what you have here. David is turning in his experience of aloneness and recognizing who God is.

God has unfailing love. Now, why is that important? Well, unfailing love, the Hebrew word for this is the word hesed. It's a word that communicates the covenant one way. Love of God, love without condition. Why is that important? Because where can you be most known and most accepted anywhere in the world is when you come to Jesus Christ and experience his love, his goodness, and his grace in your life.

And here's how this plays into your loneliness. You may hear this and go, well, wait, are you just telling me to turn to God and my loneliness will be solved? That doesn't really help me. I get that. But if you come to Jesus and feel known, which who can know you better than God who sees everything, and be accepted, what that does is it allows you now to go into your human relationships instead of demanding that the person know you fully and accept you perfectly, you can say, I can take whatever you have to give as a gift instead of loading into it too much. And you're able to give more.

One of the things that happens when you come to faith is one of the reasons the gospel is such an amazing catalyst for social change is because when you understand the message personally, now, instead of sitting in judgment of other people, you can sit in a place of saying, I am somebody who does not feel superior to you at all because I come only because of what Jesus Christ has done on my behalf.

What often kills relationships is our inherent need for self-righteousness to say I somehow am better than other people in whatever category you want to use, and therefore it kills relationships. And what should be true in the church ultimately is that the church should be one of the best places to come and experience being known and being accepted. It should be better than the bar for that, but sometimes it doesn't feel that way because sometimes when you're at church, you feel like there are the eyes of judgment.

When you go to the bar, everyone just says, hey, come on in and have a beer. But in the bar, there's no basis for it. And sooner or later it will be, well, here's a sense of judgment. In the church, you're known and accepted if you've come to Jesus Christ. And this is his phrase, he says, because of your unfailing love and the salvation you've given. Now in the Old Testament, I believe that this is foreshadowing that the word could mean your deliverance. He could have been looking at a temporal deliverance, but I believe he's looking ahead to the ultimate deliverance.

And certainly, where we live in history, we can say the salvation of God is referring to the fact that there's a hope that says, whatever my aloneness or loneliness is in this world, I wasn't created to be alone. And it reminds me of my need for something eternal. And then he says, and God, you've been good to me. God, I've experienced

your goodness in so many ways. I see friends and family can all meet different needs and different seasons of your life, but if you and I do not have our souls satisfied at a deeper level, then we will look for horizontally what we can only get vertically, and Christ is the one who can be our truest friend.

And over the last few years, with remote work and different things, people have gotten used to more and more alone time. And what's happened for many of us is our social relationships have kind of narrowed to just the ones that we want as our close friends, and we actually work at keeping up with them.

But community-wise, what we need is we need people who are really close to us and then we need some people who know us and accept us, but we also need some people that we share life with, share values with, and share passions with along the way. And sometimes that comes in casual environments. And if you're a parent and your kids are into lacrosse and you travel every weekend for travel lacrosse, what happens?

Well, you're sharing life. You're sharing a passion. Unless you're just doing it for your kids and stuff, you're sharing values because you're saying this is what we're about. And so, all of a sudden, your little lacrosse community feels like it's this great community, but then the lacrosse season ends. And what happens is the next season comes. It's new people, and you start all over and you never feel that sense of continuity.

The church is one of those places where in-person worship and being part of a group can allow you to come into a place of deeper relational connectivity, and it reflects the character of God. We have student groups, we have adult groups, we have studies, and we have just the broader community. But it is part of God's answer, I believe, for our feeling of aloneness.

And I know that you can say, well, I come to church and I still feel alone, or I've been coming and I still feel alone. And by the way, that can happen in any environment and any size church. What it requires, at least in part, is to say let me get my deepest need met in Jesus. And then start to say, how can I offer myself in the community to others? And what I believe God will continue to do in that instance is meet you and begin to address your aloneness, as you say how can I be that for other people, be a friend to other people in their journey, a champion, a companion, maybe a challenger at different points?

And if you and I will give ourselves to the community, I think we'll start to see that we're really not alone in this world, not just because of the presence of others, but

because it's the way that God mitigates his presence in our lives. And we say, I'm not alone because there's a God who has not left me alone.

Will you pray with me? God, I ask today that you would help each one of us who's gathered here in Southpointe, Butler, the Strip District, online, and in the Chapel to not just simply be in a place where we say, I need to try harder, but we would get our deepest needs met. And the only place where they really can be met is in your presence, your knowledge, and your acceptance in our lives. And that would lead us to greater connectivity in our human relationships, in our families, in our communities, and in our neighborhoods. God, I pray that that would be true for each one of us. And I pray this today in Jesus' name. Amen.