

What Do We Do When We're the Ones Hurting Ourselves?

Message #7 in the series "Beyond Hurt"

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For those of you who are visiting with us, a warm welcome to you. My name is David Woolverton. I'm one of the pastors here. It's a real joy for us to continue today in a message series that we have been calling Beyond Hurt. Today we're taking this message to a very personal, very deep level. The message today is, what do we do when we're the ones who are hurting ourselves? Well, we have a guest preacher today, a young lady who I have known for the better part of 20 years. I've watched her grow up. In fact, prior to this, my wife, Kristine, actually taught Becky in elementary school. So, we've known Becky for quite a while. That was just a couple of years ago, right? And when I was planning out this series getting to this particular message, the beautiful thing is I just knew that Becky's testimony fit perfectly. And so, part of what her story represents may be hard for her to share and part of it may be challenging for us to hear. But if you open your mind and your heart to what the Lord is doing in and through this young lady, you will discover a God who redeems all things who never wastes a hurt and who took a young person in a very bad, broken life and now called her to ministry. Would you open your heart and your mind and your Bibles to hear the message of God through Becky Rupp? Becky, welcome. Thank you.

I think I need a personal assistant for all of my stuff. The one time I do this, it's fine. So, I would like to open and ask you guys to indulge me on something. Once I put all my things on their places, hopefully they stay. All right. So, if you would be willing to, I would ask for you to stand with me and sing sort of a prayer sort of a Thanksgiving that you guys should all know. It's one of the pieces of my story and the mosaic of my story and something that brings me comfort and peace and also feel like we can kind of open this time with it. So, would you sing with me, the doxology?

Praise God, from whom all blessings flow. Praise him, all creatures here below. Praise him above ye heavenly host. Praise Father, Son and Holy Ghost. Amen.

Wow, that was amazing. Thank you. You can sit down. I remember a time I try not to go on too many side trips this morning. I remember a time when Pastor David opened every service at St. Mark's with a song, and it's one of those pieces that I look back on in my life and I'm very thankful for. So, our lives, this is a quote from Henri Nouwen, "our lives are unique stones in the mosaic of human existence, priceless and irreplaceable."

If you were here when Pastor David started this series Beyond Hurt, he had a basket of mosaic tiles right in the front and asked us all to grab one on our way out and it was really interesting, he had asked me to do this message prior to that. And I had started kind of working on it. But when he gave that first message, I was like, wow, this is... OK, I can do this. This has been in my pocket since that message, and I stick my hand in my pocket and I am reminded of that message and the idea that we're all pieces in a bigger mosaic, but also all the parts of our lives are pieces in the mosaic that is us. And I choose this image because Pastor David gave us these little perfect little mosaic tiles, but Becky's mosaic looks more like those pieces. Lots of cracked, broken,



mismatched, don't look like much on their own until they all come together in the picture that God has made in my life. And I have a feeling that many of you feel the same about your journey.

So, I don't know the message this morning was supposed to be about when we hurt ourselves and learning to forgive ourselves and learning to forgive God. I don't know if anybody here has struggled with an internal conflict. Like when you go to the Chinese buffet and you've already had a plate and you're deciding whether to have a second plate or you've already had two plates and you're deciding whether to have a third, or maybe when you've already had three and you're deciding whether or not you can actually eat dessert. I don't know. Can anyone raise your hand if you've ever had? OK, cool. I'm not alone. Here's another example, so I've been indoctrinating my daughter to the world of Harry Potter. She's 12 1/2 and still hasn't seen all the films. I don't know how that happened. So, we started watching them together, and our internal conflict every night is whether to finish the one we're on or go to sleep or go to the next one because that one's already over, but it's 11 o'clock and we should probably go to bed. There's a lot of that like debate going on. But we all have lots of other internal conflicts. Kind of like this guy up here, like the devil on one shoulder and the angel on the other shoulder fighting back and forth. Excuse me. And I think like we can use examples like when you're in a job and you're debating changing to a different job or maybe leaving an unhealthy relationship. Or for me, recently I graduated in May with my bachelor's degree, and I had a massive internal conflict about whether or not to start right away on my master's or give myself a year. And I think I chose the right one, but I still don't like the decision I made. I'm currently in the first semester. It's a lot.

So, there's also like whether or not to have a difficult conversation with somebody that we care about. And Pastor David's kind of been hitting on that a bunch too with our relationships and how to have conflict that's healthy and moves us forward, whether or not to reach out and ask for help when we're struggling. And it's hard to reach out and ask for help because it might shatter that perfect Instagram, Facebook picture of our lives and we have to risk being vulnerable. Those are just some examples that I could think of. I've experienced tons of internal conflict. I am literally my own worst enemy. Like I wish I could have. Maybe I should ask Chris to help me photoshop a picture of me with the devil guy because totally describes me to a tee. And a lot of that is as a result, probably of unresolved internal conflict. Like that question about whether or not to have a difficult conversation, I've stalled on that for 30 some years probably. Wanted to have difficult conversations, but too scared. So didn't do it. And that causes a buildup in your heart. I've made poor choices as a result of those things. When Pastor David asked me to talk this morning and he said what the topic was, I was like, OK, I probably have three days' worth of material to pull from about things that I've done that have hurt myself. But as I started thinking about it and praying about it, I really decided that I feel like God was helping me to see that the struggles and the choices and the things that I did that hurt myself, shouldn't be the focus.

So, I'm going to give you guys like a bird's eye view, like the Reader's Digest version of some of the things so you have a little context for those of you who don't know me, but I'm not going to dove super deep into any of it because I feel like it's less important than other things, I want to say this morning. And, if you feel like you want to hear more of my story and want to talk about it like I'm game, hunt me down through somebody who knows me, ask Pastor David, he can put you in touch with me. You'll hear later like, that's one of my biggest joys is sharing hope and sharing my experience with other people. So, all right. That's all to the side now.

So, I'm going to give you the brief overview. I grew up in Lancaster County in church kind of. My grandmother played the piano at Newtown United Methodist for 50 some odd years, and I

remember being there as a child and listening to her. So that was a formative thing. But everybody in my family, I feel like in my immediate family had kind of these on again, off again, relationships with God. Not that we don't all to some degree. But that formed me, and so then my parents had a very rocky relationship. They split up and got back together and separated and got back together and separated and got back together. And I could probably say that six more time and then they finally ended things and got a divorce when I was in fourth grade. And then when I was in sixth grade, my father received a cancer diagnosis and died six months later in November next week. Still a sore spot, but that is probably the one thing that I can kind of trace a lot of things back to was losing my dad. We had a super close relationship as much as we could in the midst of all the chaos. I felt close to him, and I felt like he loved me. And when that went away, obviously I was pretty angry and hurt and had a lot of questions for God. Like a lot of questions for God. Like, what the heck do you think you're doing? And pretty much around that time said, I don't want to talk to you anymore. Like, see you, you did this thing, and it's really crappy, and I can't, as the kids today would say, I just can't.

So that was a big thing and that impacted for a lot of years. And I think when I was in middle school, no high school, I started going to church. I went to youth group, heard some people talk about God in a way that I hadn't heard anyone talk about them before, but still really struggled to make it real and get it past those hurting parts that were like, I don't know, he might be cool to you, but he took my dad. So, I don't know what you can do about that, but I don't think I like him too much. That was pretty much at the base of everything I thought about God was, but you did this, how could you say you love me? And like I feel like I have to live up to something that I can't possibly live up to, and I'm making all these mistakes and I'm sure you're mad at me, so I'm just going to stop trying to make you happy because I'm going to fail. So that like that formed pretty much how I thought about everything. There was a whole lot of guilt and condemnation and shame and anger that went into my adolescence.

And then in high school, middle school somewhere around there I would say that my first real addiction was relationships and boys, and that became the trajectory pretty much from there on out. So, there was this this pull of like I'm going to youth group, but I'm also doing this other stuff that I'm not supposed to be doing and I know I'm not supposed to be doing because the Youth Pastor keeps talking about adultery every week, and clearly that's what I'm doing, and God must be really mad at me. So, I don't know what to do with this. I really kept feeling this feeling of like, how could a perfect God, supposedly perfect God possibly want anything to do with me? Like why would he want to keep loving me if I keep screwing it up? How many chances is he going to give me before he just says, You're not worth my time anymore? Why was I wasting his time? Like, why bother even doing any of this because I'm literally wasting his time? I don't know if anybody has struggled with those kinds of thoughts and feelings, but they turn into a mountain that you literally can't get around. They're like a ton of bricks sitting on your chest all day long every day, and they impact everything you do. You literally feel like poo. Like the worst piece of poo on the planet, that's me sitting over there. And then you don't like feeling that way, so you try to find things that will make you not feel that way. Like drugs and alcohol and boys, most I mean, they were men, but they were boys. And those things lead to other bad choices, which then make you feel like an even bigger piece of poo, because now I'm a single mother. And I have a child who I want to love, who I do love, but I don't know how to be a mom. I don't know how to be responsible. I can't keep a job. I just want a party. It's all really hard. Can I escape now, please? Because that would be preferable. But I still want to do this thing, but I'm not doing it well.

Like, it's just a massive snowball that takes over and there's no getting out of it. And it just keeps cycling and picking up steam and speed and size, and before you know it, you're in rehab because you disappeared for two days and didn't take care of your child. And we're out partying

and left her somewhere and left her in a situation that wasn't awesome. And realize that you haven't been taking care of your daughter who you say you love and want to love.

So that was 10 years ago, a little over 10 years ago. I went to rehab. Rehab was really hard. I've been suicidal twice in my life, it was after my dad died and when I went to rehab. The rehab kicked me out because my insurance ran out while I was there and they were like, you can't stay here, so you're going to have to find a recovery house. I was like a week and a half into it, which isn't really long enough to kick somebody out, but you know, it's fine. It worked out. They took me in a van to the city of York and took me to a recovery house and two days later, I was like, this is not working because nobody else here is trying to actually do this thing. So, I walked across town to the women's shelter where had been a few years before that - I've been homeless a number of times and went to the women's shelter, rang the doorbell. Pam walked up and answered the door and like, I couldn't even get a word out of my mouth, and she comes bursting through the door and wraps me in the giant like, bear hug, can't breathe and she's like, I'm so happy to see you. What? Like what even is that? And it was crazy.

What the heck man the God who stays like that is like, literally? Wow. Yes. Like arms wide open. Totally accepted and loved. And I had never felt that. I know now looking back on my life that I there's people who have been in my life for a very long time who loved me and genuinely loved me, but at the time, I couldn't feel it to that extent, but something broke in me that day and I was like, wow, I think this is what God's love feels like in human form for the moment. God like, did one of those Ghost moments where He like, went into Pam and like, hugged me. That's all I can say. That had to have been what happened because there's no way a human being could have loved me to the magnitude that I felt at that moment. So that was literally the beginning of what is now over the last 10 years, and that's what I really want to kind of focus on some of the things that God has taught me and shown me and allowed me to see and learn that have taken me from not being able to see past the mountain of shame and guilt to literally feeling like I'm on top of a mountain every day with him.

I want to share with you a scripture passage from Romans. But I want to share to you from this translation, which is the Message. Hopefully some of you like the Message. Not everybody does. This Bible came in donations when I was at the women's shelter and Pam was getting ready to get rid of it because she's a New King James only person. She's like, do not read that Bible. It is - I won't say the word. I love this Bible. I have, I mean, as you can see, there's stickers and duct tape because it doesn't stay together anymore and bookmarks from, I don't even know what all anymore. But yeah, I learned how to love the word through this book. So, I'm going to start in verse 14.

I can anticipate the response that is coming. "I know that all God's commands are spiritual, but I'm not. Isn't this also your experience?" Yes, I am full of myself, after all, I've spent a long time in sin's prison. What I don't understand about myself is that I decide one way, but then I act another, doing things I absolutely despise. So, if I can't be trusted to figure out what is best for myself and then do it, it becomes obvious that God's command is necessary. But I need something more! For if I know the law but still can't keep it, and if the power of sin within me keeps sabotaging my best intentions, I obviously need help! I realize that I don't have what it takes. I can will it, but I can't do it. I decide to do good, but I don't really do it; I decide not to do bad, but then do it anyway. My decisions, such as they are, don't result in actions. Something has gone wrong deep within me and gets the better of me every time. It happens so regularly that it's predictable. The moment I decide to do good sin is there to trip me up. I truly delight in God's commands, but it's obvious that not all of me joins

in that delight. Parts of me covertly rebel, and just when I least expect it, they change charge. They take charge. I've tried everything, and nothing helps. I'm at the end of my rope. Is there no one who can do anything for me? Isn't that the real question? The answer, thank God, is that Jesus Christ can and does. He acted to set things right in this life of contradictions where I want to serve God with all my heart and mind, but am pulled by the influence of sin to do something totally different. [Romans 7:14-25, MSG]

The answer, thank God, is that Jesus can and does. So, 10 plus years ago, a little over 10 years ago on the front step of that shelter, I had professed faith and been baptized in high school, but I really, really, really, really let him in. But it didn't happen overnight, like this stuff I have this underlined and circled and underlined some more and then highlighted because I didn't like I couldn't get it. And I'm like reading this thing and I'm like, OK, it says that Jesus did it, but like, I still feel like I need to do something. The point is, I can't do anything. None of us can. Our best



isn't good enough. I found this T-shirt on a Christian T-shirt website a couple of years ago and I was like, What the heck, man? Like, who says that to somebody like who says your best isn't good enough? Like what? I feel attacked right now. Like, I've been trying to do this like positive thinking thing. Like, you can do this. You got this like, you're enough. No, I am literally not enough. I am not good enough. And that's actually good because Jesus is, and He already did it so I don't have to do it. What? And like there's another verse in the Bible, it says, like, OK, so we accept Grace, but does that let us off the hook? No, it doesn't let us off the hook, but it does say that like when I trip and fall down, I don't have to lay on the ground and beat myself for falling on the ground. I can get up and like, take another step and try it again because Jesus already took care of it. What? Mind blown.

This passage, this I don't know if you guys are, I'm sure you are familiar with John 8. The woman who was caught indulging in adultery. So, I went to a Bible study in a church not long after I got to the shelter and the pastor opened up and he was like, all right, everybody, turn in your Bibles to John 8. I didn't know what John 8 was off top of my head. Open up the Bible. I'm like, Awwwwwww Really? I don't want to listen to this crud like, yes, I get it. OK, I need to stop sinning. I literally would jump to the end of the passage, not read anything else and say, See the go and sin no more. And I'm like, I can't. I'm going to read this with you.

When Jesus had raised Himself up and saw no one but the woman, He said to her, "Woman where are those accusers of yours? Has no one condemned you?" She said, No one, Lord." And Jesus said to her, "neither do I condemn you." [John 8:10-11, NKJV]

I have this on a bracelet to remind myself the only person in the entire universe who had a right to condemn that woman, didn't. And like my story is so close to that woman's story, like I could have been pulled out in the middle of a street naked a million times for literally the same thing and He would have said it to me every time. That's the thing that grace and that love and that forgiveness are the things that can turn that mountain and get it out of the way. Because I don't

have to live to this crazy standard that I used to have to think ahead like I can't. I'm not perfect. I'm not going to be perfect. I was talking with Pastor David about this when I was getting ready to give the message and I was sitting and doing some alone time the one day. And it's funny because I'm now arguing with God about different things like I'm no longer arguing with God about I can't stop finding guys to be with. I can't stop wanting to take drugs. Those are the things I used to argue with God about. Kind of like the thing with my dad like God, why did you take my dad? God, why won't you take this struggle away? Like, I want to love you? Why won't you take it away? I don't argue about that anymore. Amazingly, somehow, somewhere along the journey, like those are not the things I argue with him about anymore. Now I argue with him about like, God, what is it you want me to do with my life? I can't figure it out. Would you please just tell me like, I want to read my Bible more often, but I can't get in the habit? Would you please just make me do it like, please force me to do the things I want to do because I can't do them on my own? And He's like, Becky, stop! I'm not judging you against some standard that you have in your brain. There is no perfect Becky on this side of Heaven. You're not going to get there. Whatever this imaginary thing is that you have in your brain that you think you need to be, you are not going to be it, it's fine. You're going to be who I want you to be and I'm going to be with you through the whole thing and I'm going to do it. So, like, it's literally no pressure stop. Like, why could I not get this 20 years ago? Like what the heck?

So, I recently left a position, but I was working at North Star Initiative, which is an organization that helps women who have been sex trafficked. There's a home and there are up to 10 ladies that live there at any one time. And it's really hard to imagine, but the amount of trauma and stuff that these girls have been through is just ridiculous. And a lot of them deal with addictions and a lot of them deal with massive anxiety and depression and like all of the things. I was having a conversation with one of the girls not too long ago. Well, it was probably a few months ago. Back in February, I had an important anniversary and she at the same time was having an anniversary. So, she was like, Becky, I got to 60 days. Like, that is amazing. Sixty days is awesome. Like when you're doing sobriety, like two days is awesome. 60 days is like never going to happen until it does. And I had just celebrated 10 years. And she asked me, she's like, she's talking to me and she's like, she's like, I can't even think about what 90 days looks like compared to 10 years. And she's like, when I think about living the rest of my life sober, it's like, what in the world will that look like? And I was like, well, I don't know. It'll look different for you than it looks for me. But this is, I mean, this is what looks for me. And I'm not like, I don't know. I think I'm doing OK. I'm a little nuts, but you know, it's fine. She's like, I love that, and I'm like, Good. Somebody does. She was like. What am I going to do to take the edge off? Like when things are really hard. What do you do to take the edge off? That's like total addict thing, like I need to take the edge off right now, so I'm going to have a drink or I'm going to smoke a joint or whatever the case may be. And it was like the Holy Spirit showed up in the moment and spoke before I could think what I was going to say out of my mouth and I was like, I think you have to learn to live with the edge. Like, sobriety isn't a Band-Aid. Actually, the addiction was a Band-Aid, and sobriety is ripping the Band-Aid off. Ouch. Like, we don't want it to be harder than the actual thing was, but it actually is harder than the thing was. And the whole point is that you have to learn how to live with the stuff that you're trying to cover up when you were doing the thing. So, like it is about learning to live with the edge, like feeling the feelings and not trying to run away from them.



This passage, this verse to me, kind of like sums up that idea that Jesus is talking to his disciples, and He says,

"I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world." [John 16:33 NIV]

When I was preparing for this, I read that verse and I was like, all right, so I'm going to pop back into my Bible college and my listening to Pastor David Days. And like that first phrase says, I have said this to you and I'm like, OK, so what did he say? Like, what was it that He said to me that I'm supposed to like, put this in the context of now? And this is what He said,

"The hour is coming, indeed, it has come, when you will be scattered, each one to his home, and you will leave me alone. Yet I am not alone because the Father is with me." [John 16:32]

So, He said this. And then He said, in this world, you will have trouble but take heart. Jesus knew what He was looking at, what He was facing. And He faced it. I mean, OK, we can all sit here and go. Well, He was Jesus, He had to. Right, OK. What He did, He had like one way or another, we all have to face the things. There's no getting around them. We have to go through the hard things, not around the hard things. You can't avoid the hard things. You can't numb the hard things. You can, but I guarantee you when you go back and try to rip that Band-Aid off, that thing is nasty and infected, and it will not look good at all.

Grace is found and the mosaic of our lives becomes more beautiful when we choose to go through the hard stuff. I gave the example of my dad's passing for a long time that was like the hardest thing for me. I mean, I can look back and see some other stuff that was definitely out of place and messed up that contributed to some of my messed-up ness. But that was like the catalyst that like made everything explode. Pastor David asked me to speak this morning, I think if I'm remembering correctly, he's asked me to speak, maybe two other times. The first time was a long time ago, a very long time ago at St. Mark's, and it was because we were in a message series very similar to this talking about grief and loss and how God takes the things in our life and makes beautiful things out of them. And I spoke that particular Sunday before I ever even thought about preaching ever, I spoke about my dad and how losing my dad was very, very hard, but it has shaped and changed me in so many ways that looking back, I can say are good.

My dad loved to play guitar and sing. And literally the only reason I ever picked up a guitar was because I wanted to be like my dad. He had a huge heart. I try every day to love people the way I remember him loving people. My daughter is named after him like silly things, but I'm like, Carleigh wouldn't be Carleigh without my dad. God has taken that hurtful thing and so many other hurtful things and made them into very beautiful things, being at North Star like just being able to sit and talk with women who have been through atrocious things and not be freaked out by any of what they say, because I've seen a lot of the things that they've gone through firsthand and not be afraid when they have a panic attack and are laying on the floor shaking because I've seen it. I've kind of been through it ish once or twice, like God has taken that junk that it like nobody else would, I don't I don't want to go back in my life and relive it, but He's taken it all and made it into something amazing.

I want to share this verse with you. Everybody, most everybody should be familiar with this,

"My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore, I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses so that Christ's power may rest on me. That is why, for Christ's sake, I delight in weaknesses, in

insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong." [II Corinthians 12:9-10 NIV]

Pastor David asked me to do this message like months ago, and I was like, yeah. We had a whole discussion about whether or not I wanted to do it and whether we were going to call it preaching or not and that was the whole thing. But I decided, yes, I would do it and almost like within that week, had pretty much most of what I shared this morning. And God knew what He was doing, obviously, because the last two, three weeks of my life have been one of those whirlwind tornado craziness. But God has showed up in like huge, huge ways and taking care of me and my daughter and like giving me so much to be grateful for and He's using all of these pieces from throughout my life and my experiences and shaping them all into this thing, and I'm loving seeing how He's taking this stuff now. Just He's just so good.

I want to end kind of the same way I started and I'm going to sing the benediction. This is another piece of the mosaic of my life. I went to Hempfield High School and every choral concert they ended with this song and everybody who was ever in chorus, ever at Hempfield knows it. And if you're at a concert, you get to go up on stage and sing it with all the current students. It's a really cool experience. But the song is beautiful, and it comes straight from scripture, and I really just wanted to share it with you guys' kind of as a prayer as I finish here this morning.

The Lord bless you and keep you. The Lord, lift his countenance upon you and give you peace and give you peace, the Lord, make His face to shine upon you and be gracious, and be gracious, gracious unto You. Amen. Amen. Amen. Thank you.