

Series: Restless

Loneliness Epidemic

Genesis 2:18-20

Sermon by Lead Pastor Paul Joslin

Waterstone Community Church, Littleton, Colorado

Sunday morning, April 26, 2026

Video: Hello Waterstone family. We are Phil and Sharla Shaver, who are serving in Central Asia. We have been here for over twenty years, and we are thankful for all your support in partnering with us. We are very grateful that we are able to share the word this morning, and Sharla will read today's scripture to you. I will be reading from Genesis chapter 2, verses 18 through 20: "The Lord God said, 'It is not good for man to be alone. I will make a helper.' Now the Lord God had formed out of the ground all the beasts of the field and all the birds of the air. He brought them to the man to see what he would name them, and whatever the man called each living creature, that was its name. So, the man gave names to all the livestock, the birds of the air, and all the beasts of the field, but for Adam, no suitable helper was found." The word of the Lord.

Paul: All right, you may be seated. It is one of the ways we want to try to introduce our church to different global partners around the world, is having them do the scripture reading for us occasionally, so thanks to Phil and Sharla for doing that for us today. So, we are continuing, this is week two of our series called Restless, where we are looking at the idea that we have restless souls, that in the year 2026, many of us are living an existence that feels restless. There is low-grade anxiety, there are frustrations, there is just uncertainty in the world, and what does it look like for us to find rest in Jesus?

Today I want to talk very specifically about what I think is a key contributor to many of us feeling restless in our lives, and that is this, loneliness. I think when you look at our culture, our society, the people that we bump shoulders with, one of the reasons so many of us feel restless is because we have this deep level of loneliness that we do not know what to do with. Loneliness is interesting because it can pop up anywhere for you. It can happen at a spouse's business party, the Christmas party where you get invited, and they know all the people in the room, and you do not know anyone, and so you just awkwardly hang out. It can happen in the space where maybe you are invited by a friend to go to a birthday party, but you do not know anybody there. It can happen in the grocery store where you just see other people interacting with each other. It can happen when you see somebody propose to someone else, and you are like, "Gosh, will that ever happen to me?" It could pop up in all sorts of places.

One of the places I have noticed for myself, well, no, not for myself. This has never happened to me before, but feeling lonely at kids' birthday parties is a thing. Has anybody felt that? Guys, you probably know what I am talking about. You take your little kid to a kid's birthday party, and you walk into the room, and suddenly you realize, "I don't know any of the people here, and somehow, I got roped into being at this party. My wife is taking the other kid somewhere else, and so now I have to figure out, okay, what do I do?" So, you go get a Capri Sun and a slice of cake, and then you figure out, like, "Okay, do I know anyone in this room? No, I do not. Okay, I am going to set down the Capri Sun for a minute, and I am going to do classic move number one, which is pull out my phone and pretend that I just got a text. I definitely did not get a text, but I might have gotten a text. So, if I just look at my phone, then I will look

like I am busy and important, and then maybe someone will talk to me,” but that does not work. Nobody comes up and talks to a person looking at their phone, so you think, “Okay, I should put that away. That is pretty antisocial,” and then you start scanning the room. You try to figure out, “Do I know anyone here?” and then suddenly a person you do not know, but you are supposed to know them, like you are supposed to know their name. You have met them before at the last birthday party, and suddenly you lock eyes, and you start to wonder, “Okay, is this like a head nod situation? Like just what’s up? Like yeah,” and leave it there? Do you move across the room, and do you shake a hand of someone and say like, “Hey, how is it going?” and then you do not know their name, and they know you do not know their name, and so that is going to be awkward, and so do you reintroduce yourselves? Do you just pretend you know each other’s names and have a seven-minute conversation that neither of you know how to get out of? All hypothetical, never happened to me at all. I am sure it has never happened to you either. It is those places where suddenly you just realize, like, “I am on my own, and I do not know someone, and I do not know if people know me,” and for some of you, that could happen, like I said, at a grocery store, or a business party. It could happen with a group of friends in your small group where you just feel unseen. Maybe it happens in the church lobby. You walk in, you grab your cup of coffee, you get your donut, and you start scanning the room trying to figure out, “Okay, do I know anyone here? Where do I fit? Where do I belong?”

Many of us go through life feeling lonely in different spaces, and some of it is circumstantial, like I just mentioned, and some of it goes much deeper than that. In fact, they are doing a lot of research right now, and psychologists are saying that we are in a state of what they call the loneliness epidemic. Over half of adults report that they feel isolated, left out, or lacking companionship, at least some of the time. I want you to look at those statistics for just a second. That means half of the people that you know, half the people in your kids’ school pickup line, half of the people sitting in this room, half of the people in your small group, they are feeling some sort of loneliness in their lives. The same survey was conducted by another group, and they did research with three-thousand adults, and they found that seven in ten people said they needed more emotional support in the past year than they actually received. Seven out of ten felt like I am going through more than I know how to handle on my own, and I need someone to come and join me or support me or be on my side, be on my team, and I can’t find it. Seven out of ten felt loneliness in that way.

Loneliness is no longer being described as just a social issue. Some of you probably know this. It is actually being defined now as a public health crisis, and studies are showing that the health risks associated with chronic loneliness are comparable to smoking fifteen cigarettes a day. That is not good for you. That’s the state of loneliness, which means when we talk about something like loneliness, we are not just talking about something sad or something that is bad or something that we want to fix for you. When we talk about loneliness, we are talking about something that is quite literally stealing our lives away.

One of the researchers said this, to quote how they were looking at all of this research about loneliness: “Psychological research shows us that loneliness and isolation may increase the risk of premature mortality and are also linked with depression, poor sleep, cognitive decline. We also know that social support is one of the strongest predictors of people’s well-being. Reinforcing that connection is vital to our health. Reaching out, showing up, and building community are not optional. They are essential.”

I think one of the reasons why this topic of loneliness can hit some of us so deeply is even if you're in the room today and you're like, "Sorry, I am in the other fifty-percent, or I'm one of the three that does not feel like I do not have enough emotional support," there still hits something very revealing about our souls, that we all know what it is to feel lonely at different points in our time. So even if you're good right now, you know what that experience is like. You know what it is like to walk into a room and feel like you are completely unseen and nobody knows what is really going on with you. Loneliness hits something very deep within us, and what I would contend is that when we are lonely, when we are experiencing that level of loneliness, that contributes to how our souls feel so restless. When we need to find rest for our souls, as Jesus promises in Matthew 11, and we looked last week at how rest for our souls is not just a nap or a break or getting something like a vacation. It is something deeper than that, something that is longing within how you were designed to live that you do not have, that can be found in Jesus.

So, when we talk about loneliness today, I don't want to just say like, "Hey, go find more friends." Like "Be an extrovert if you're an introvert." That doesn't help anyone. You need to look deeper than that, and so what I would like to do with you today is actually walk through the entire story of scripture, from Genesis to Revelation, and I promise we are going to do this in like thirty minutes. We do this occasionally, where we look through a theme like loneliness in the entire scripture. We are going to go at fast pace. We will have all of the scriptures on the screen for you to follow along with, and here is what I want you to see. It is that loneliness is actually antithetical to how you were designed. God created you, He made you a particular way, and loneliness is antithetical to how you were designed and created, and so what I want to look at is why we feel so lonely and what Jesus potentially could do about that.

So if you have your Bibles, if you want to follow along, we are going to be flipping through a lot of different places, but you can open up to Genesis 2:18. That is where we are going to begin today, and what you will see is when you turn to the opening pages of scripture, you find that the opening story of humanity does not begin with isolation or loneliness, but it begins with relationship. In fact, in Genesis 1:27 we are told that humans, which is all of us in this room, were created in the image of God, and that God was triune. He was in perfect relationship and harmony with Himself, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and that you being created in His image means that you were designed for relationship as well. God exists eternally in communal love and shared life and self-giving presence, and to be made in His image means that you were designed for that same thing, to be in community, to be in self-giving presence and shared life, so Genesis 2:18, it says this, "The Lord God said, 'It is not good for the man to be alone, so I will make a helper suitable for him.'"

Now, what is really important for you to know is that this is the first time in scripture God says something is not good, the first time. In all of the creation account, He looks at birds, and He says, "good." He looks at mountains, and He says, "good." He looks at the stars and sky and the heavens, and He says, "good," and He looks at man, who is living alone, humanity alone, and He says, "This is not good." In fact, other than cats, this is the only time God says things are not good in scripture. It is true. It is in First Opinions 2:3, or something like that, I think. That is a really bad pastor joke. I didn't have that one there, First Opinions. I am not going to do that in the 10:45 service for sure. The cat one is staying. That's staying, but not the opinions. All right, we are digressing.

Here is what this means, and here is what is so striking about this passage. It is not only that this is the first time God says something is not good. Do you know when He says it? Before the fall, so in a perfect world, where everything is good, God looks at humanity in isolation and says, “Oh, that is not good. That is not what they were designed for. That is not how they were supposed to be.” Which means that even in a perfect world, isolation is not good for the human soul. Even before sin and brokenness entered into our world and fractured our sense of self and our relationship with others, God still looked at that and said, “That is not the way things are supposed to be.” Which means simply that you are a soul, and you were made for communion, and I am going to talk a little bit about why communion and not community or relationship, because it gets to something deeper. We will get to that once we hit the New Testament, but what you need to understand from the outset today is your soul was designed for presence and for relationship and for being known deeply and loved deeply and knowing others and loving others deeply as well.

Communion is this idea of living with God and with one another and yourself in a way that is honest, present, and whole, and from the very beginning, God said, it is not good for you to be alone, which means that when you feel lonely, when you feel isolated, when you feel like no one knows you or people do not love you the way that you desire, that is not something wrong with you. You were designed for that kind of love, for that kind of knowing, and when you do not experience that, of course you would feel lonely and restless, because you were designed and created for communion. Which is why loneliness is so tragic, because none of us were meant to live a life of loneliness for too long, and so you probably know parts of the story.

We were created not to live in isolation, but to live in communion, and then that is the perfect world that God says, “Okay, this is not good for man to be alone,” and so he creates woman, and so they have relationship together, and it is not just about marriage. It is about something deeper than that. It is about the idea that your soul was not intended to walk through this life alone, and you can find communion outside of marriage with other people. It is not essentially about marriage. It is about how our souls were designed, but then the story goes that the man and his wife, they fell, and they rebelled against God by eating of the tree that He told them not to, and then this is what we are told in Genesis 3:8 through 10: “The man and his wife heard the sound of the Lord God as He was walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and they hid from the Lord God among the trees of the garden, but the Lord called to the man, ‘Where are you?’ and he answered, ‘I heard you in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked, and so I hid.’” This is the first moment in human history when someone felt the need to hide from another person because of who they were, and we have been hiding from each other ever since. You were made for communion and for relationship, being known and being loved, but we hide. You and I hide. We hide from each other. We hide from God. We hide from ourselves.

What we see in this story is that it is not just that sin makes us guilty before a righteous God. It is that it also makes us guarded with God. “I hid because I was afraid,” and some of you know what it is to live that existence, to feel the fear of exposure with God or with others, and so you just pull back, and you refrain from being known. You refrain from being loved, and you refrain from allowing yourself to experience the communion that you were intended for.

So many of us just learn how to live life on the surface, and so we meet people, we encounter people at a ball game or at a party or at church, and we just keep everything on a surface level. We talk about things like the weather, our schedule for the week, the game that happened last night, the show that we are watching, the headlines that we are encountering, the kids and everything going on with them, the meal we tried, the trip we took, and none of that is bad, but we all instinctively manage how much of ourselves we reveal, don't we, and we just choose to opt out. We choose to curate how to present ourselves to the world, because we are afraid that if people knew who we really were, if we showed our true selves, then we may not be fully known and fully loved.

Here is what you need to know. It is that sin taught our souls to hide. That is the paradox of human life, isn't it? We long to be fully known, we long to be fully loved, but because we are sinful, our souls have learned that they must hide, that who we are may not be fully accepted, and so we curate, and we manage, and we project a certain image, and here is the other reality. It is that a hidden soul becomes a lonely soul, and a lonely soul becomes a restless soul. So, if you look at the pattern of scripture, you see Adam and Eve. They hide from each other, and they hide from God, and then that disease of loneliness, of isolation, of tribalism, it just begins to spread, and so you see their son, Cain, killed Abel, and then you see the nations begin to war with each other, and then you see all of them try to come together at Babel and figure out how to be one nation, but they are doing it out of pride and arrogance and rebellion against God, and so He divides them.

You just see this pattern over and over and over again throughout the Old Testament, where people are driven apart by their actions and by the way they treat people. It is stories like Joseph with his older brothers, who sell him into slavery and tell his father that an animal killed him. It is stories like David taking Bathsheba for his own wife. Just again and again and again, the heroes of scripture live in isolation. They live in fear. They pull each other apart. They pull relationship apart. That is the world we live in. That is the pattern we experience every day, but I would contend that God sees that pattern. He says, "Oh no, it is not good for them to be alone," so God decides He will do something, and so in Genesis 12:1 through 3, it says this, "The Lord said to Abram, 'Go from your country, your people, and your father's household.'" Now notice what He is saying: "I want you to pull away. I want you to go from your country, go from your people, your family," which feels a little bit like isolation, like getting rid of all of that stuff. Is that what God wants for us? But He goes on, "To the land I will show you, and I will make you into a great nation, and I will bless you, and all peoples of the earth will be blessed through you."

What is happening here is God from the very beginning plans not simply to rescue individuals from their sin and from the evil of this world. It is actually to create and form a people, and so when God calls Abraham, it is not just to save him individually. He says that you will be the father of a great nation and that all people will know who I am because of you. He is forming them into a community. God does the same thing when He delivers Israel from the people of Egypt. He pulls them to a mountain, and He says, "I will be your God, and you will be my people, and this is what it is going to look like to be in communion with me." It is as if God understands that we cannot flourish in isolation, and so from the very beginning, God's launching point of his redemptive plan is not just about forgiving sinful people. It is about forming us into a community and communion with Him and with one another.

What we see in the story is that God came to gather what was scattered, that in your isolation, in your loneliness, in the places where you feel pulled apart by not being known and feeling unloved, God sees that it is not good, and is moving into the world to do something about it, on a cosmic level, to rescue you and me from the loneliness that we experience every single day. It means when you walk into that party, and you feel isolated and like nobody knows you, or when you go into small group, and you feel like, “I don’t know if I can share what is really going on,” or when you walk through the doors of this church, and you feel like you are not seen, God sees you. He knows you, and He is moving towards you in his love, because He regathers what has been scattered. That is the heart of our Father.

It means your loneliness is not invisible to God, and then what you see is God launches this movement of people who are designed to be in communion with Him and with each other. Then the whole pattern of scripture from that point on is people try that for a little bit, and then they fail, and God says, “Okay, let’s try again.” Then they try again a little bit, and then they fail, and God says, “Okay, let’s do it again.” Then they try a little bit, and then they fail, for like hundreds of years, and then it brings us all the way to the person of Jesus, where this mission finds its fulfillment, and we are told about Jesus in John 1:14, we are told that the word became flesh and dwelt among us. God did not remain distant from our loneliness. He steps directly into it. Jesus moved into the neighborhood of loneliness in our world in order to do something about it.

What is fascinating is if you watch Jesus and how He interacts with people from the gospels, if you come to it with this lens of loneliness and you look at how He interacts with people in the gospels, what you will see is fascinating. Jesus goes out of his way again and again and again to interact with lonely people. He touches people who have not experienced community or anyone giving them a hug for years of their life, and Jesus is the one who comes up and touches people like lepers or sinners, people that were ostracized from society, the lonely, the people who were cast out and who people said do not deserve to be a part of the community anymore. “They are not good enough for the communion with God and with others that God came to establish, and so let’s just keep them out.” Those are the people that Jesus goes to. He calls tax collectors to follow Him. He goes to sex workers and calls them to follow Him. He goes to people who are failures, and He calls them to follow Him. To all of the people who are loneliest, it is like Jesus goes to them and says, “Hey, why don’t you follow me?” It is almost as if like loneliness is part of the prerequisite for following Jesus as He is walking through this life

Then in Matthew 12:46 through 50, this one is not on the screen, but I want you to listen to these words. Jesus was talking. He was teaching to the crowd, and suddenly his mothers and his brothers, they stood outside wanting to speak to Jesus, and so someone comes, and they tell Him, “Hey, your mother and brothers are standing outside. They want to speak with you,” and this is what Jesus said: “Who is my mother, and who are my brothers?” Does Jesus actually not know who his mother and his brothers are? That would be probably a problem, if He actually doesn’t know who his mother is. Then He points to his disciples, and He said, “Here are my mother and my brothers. Whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother.”

Now I want you to imagine for just a moment that I am preaching, and you are here, so it is not that hard to imagine. That is happening right now, and let’s pretend that it is going really, really well. I am dialed in, and you are dialed in to listen to me so much better than it is going right now, and in that space,

Glenn, one of our ushers, he comes forward and is like, “Hey, did you know that your family is here? Like your wife and your kids and your mom and your brothers, they just showed up. They haven’t been here, but they want to talk to you,” and I was like, “Who? Who are they? I don’t know anything about them. They’re my mother and brothers and kids?” and “No, these people are my mother and brother and kids,” and you’d be like, “Paul, I’m not your mother?” That’s weird. Like it doesn’t make sense, and you would probably have a little bit of trouble listening to me if I just like kicked my family out of the church. You’d be like, “What is this guy’s deal?” Sometimes Jesus does these kinds of things that should catch our attention, but because it is Jesus, and sometimes it feels a little cryptic, we’re like, “Oh yeah, I guess He’s just like, He’s just saying He doesn’t want to talk to his mom right now.” We have all felt that at different times. We do not want to call our moms sometimes. There is something much deeper happening in this story when Jesus says this. What Jesus is essentially saying is He is not just being dismissive of biological family, and He’s not just saying, “Don’t care about your mom.” Care about your mom. Please, love your mom. He is going deeper than that, and what He is saying is that He is announcing that the kingdom of God that He is creating and that He is inaugurating, that there is a family being formed and built around Him. He is using that circumstance to illustrate for people what it is that Jesus is doing in this space.

In Jesus’ world, family was one of the primary sources of identity and security and social location. It was one of the primary ways people identified, that these are my people, and it was tighter even than marriage, and so you will actually see stories where there were like kings in ancient Israel or like in Jesus’ time. There was a particular king that his wife and his sister had a spat, and he didn’t choose the side of his wife. He chose his sister’s side and had his wife executed. That is craziness, but that is how deeply the ties of family bonds were. You chose your family over everything. Everything was about family, and so Jesus saying in this moment, “I’m sorry, that is not my real family,” it is that He is trying to make the point that He is forming a deeper family, a deeper community, that goes deeper than even blood. It goes deeper than status or ethnicity or social network. It is all tied up in allegiance to the Father. Jesus is not abolishing your family. He is saying that the deepest layer, this new community that is being formed, is a new kind of family that is centered on Jesus Himself, and that ties directly into this thought of loneliness, because Jesus’ answer to the lonely soul is not simply, “Go find more people. Go make more friends. Go stop being lonely. Stop being lonely and just figure it out.” What Jesus says is, “Come into the family that I am forming. Come into the community of Christ.”

The invitation for us is that Jesus knows. He knows that our loneliness is not the only ache of missing companionship. It is the ache of being displaced and unknown and unsure where we belong, and so Jesus creates a community where the isolated, the lonely, the people who are outcast, find a place where they can be called brother and sister and mother and where they can have a Heavenly Father family. That’s Jesus’ answer to loneliness. Jesus entered our loneliness, and He restores us to communion, and this is important. Communion is way deeper than what we usually mean when we say community, because we can have community around a lot of things. Broncos fans, are there any Broncos fans in the room? That’s a community. Did you guys have a good draft this weekend? I don’t even know. Yeah, great. Shrugs, yes. We don’t know. Broncos, that is a community. Any families that went to Columbine, or Columbine is your school? No. Okay. Dakota Ridge, Chatfield, do you guys have kids in high school? Where are we going to school? Okay, we got a couple. Yeah, that’s another place where you can have community, right?

The neighborhood you live in, that is community, or the country club you belong to. Whether you go to Vasa or Chuse for gym membership, that is a different kind of community. I always say Vasa because it is like fancy people go there, even though it is the same price as Chuse. I don't know why I do that. I am off a little bit one or two times a day. We are doing great. At 10:45 a.m. you should come back and see how we do there, but there are different places we can form community. That is the point I am trying to make, and they can stay on the surface level. You are a Broncos fan, and you just find community, because you root for the same team, and you go to the same tailgate parties, and you hope they draft the same player, and you fight about whether or not you like Bo Nix. That is the community that is formed around that idea of being a fan, but the communion that Jesus is calling us to is more than just shared spaces or shared experiences. It is more than just staying on the surface level. What Jesus is doing in Matthew 12 is something entirely different than just community. He is forming a family around Himself, where belonging is not based on what you have in common.

Some of you know what I mean by that idea, because you are in a family where you are like, "I have nothing in common with these people," and they are still your family, and you might even have spaces where you are like, "I really wish I could have a different family," and they are still your family. That is what Jesus is saying. It is that there is a bond tied to, that we are being brought into relationship with God our Father and with one another in a way where communion is that reality, that in Christ we are no longer outsiders or alone, but sons and daughters and brothers and sisters gathered into the household of God, and that is actually the primary metaphor that you see in the New Testament. When the apostle Paul talks about church, he calls it family, and when you see the apostles in Acts preach about what is happening, they talk about family. In Acts 2, you see them come together, and the way that Acts 2 describes the church is the way that an ancient world would be describing a family, where they shared everything in common, and they cared for one another, and they made sure no one fell beneath and was suffering. What we see in the early church is that they understood this idea that the primary metaphor for what God was doing in the world and the community of people who were following Him was that He was creating a new family

There was one theologian that I came across this week. He remarked about the evangelical church in America. He said, "The evangelical church in America is in crisis and will remain in crisis until it rediscovers what it means to be God's family." Some of us come to church, and it is a place we attend, but it is not a place where we belong, and we are not participating in the life of the family. This is not just another country club. This is not just another school or another team that you root for. Following Jesus is joining a new family, and it is just the beginning of experiencing life together. You might think to yourself, "But Paul, I want a new family. I don't like this one very much." Or "Paul, can I just get into a better small group? Some of these people are weird." I will tell you a little secret. Every small group is awkward at some point. That is just part of it, but the Bible's call, scripture's call, is that we would love each other like family, and that is just the beginning.

It goes on, and what you see in Revelation 21 is this completion. We only experience that in part now, but it says in Revelation 21, look, God's dwelling place is now among the people, the family of God, and He will dwell with them. God will be with us, and the Bible does not end with isolated souls in private peace. It lives and ends with a gathered people, fully restored, fully known, fully at home in the presence

of God, and so in Christ, we are brought back into community now and forever. The story begins with God saying, “It is not good for you to be alone,” and the story ends with God saying, “You will never be alone again. Never will you be alone again.” So, your soul was made for communion, but your soul has been shaped in a world of hiding and sin and fragmentation.

So, the question is, “If I have been a follower of Jesus, and I have been asked to join this new community, and I am a part of the family of God, why do I still feel alone?” Why do I still feel alone? Some of that may have to do with the way that the family of God has shown up for you in your life, and that is a real thing. Families can hurt people. Families can leave people. Families can isolate people, and if that is part of your story, I am so sorry, and I do not want this church to be that way for you, but I want to talk a little more today about how we show up in the family, because I think one of the realities that we all face is that we have to choose how we engage with the family that we are a part of, and you can choose to hang back and be isolated and say, “I am not sure I really like these people, but I like the songs, so I will come for that,” or you can go deeper. I mean, you can go beyond loneliness.

I think a grid that is helpful for looking at how we engage, and you can actually map this onto any area of your life, but let’s just do it for church a little bit. I think that what I would contend is at the heart of this question around loneliness is the question, “Am I known, and am I loved? Am I known, and am I loved?” and not just noticed, not just included, not just tolerated, but your soul wants to be seen as it really is and then embraced there, and then here is what I think this looks like. Some of us know what it is to be not loved and not known, that we show up in the world, and we feel like nobody knows who I am, and nobody cares about what is going on in my life. This is what I was just talking about, those spaces where you have shown up to church, and the family of God has not shown up for you. You felt ignored. You felt like you missed out, like nobody actually saw you. You were unknown, and you were unloved.

The church should never be a place where that happens, but some of us know what it is like to be not known and loved, like people do not really know who you are, but they really like you. What they see of you seems awesome, and so you live in a place where you get praise and admiration, and people are looking at you like, “Oh, that person is just the best,” but you are living with this low-grade anxiety, because you are like, “If they actually knew, if they knew who I really was, they would not like me,” and so you live in this place where you allow yourself to be loved because you are not really known. Then some of us, this is really painful. We know what it is to be known and not loved, to show up with your full self, to show people who you really are, and they say, “Oh, that is too much. I can’t deal with that. I do not want that. You are too much,” and that is the ache of rejection and loneliness. The hope is that we will understand what it is to be loved and known.

I think loneliness is the ache of feeling unknown and unloved, and when we have either one of those out of balance, that is the place that we stay hidden. We feel like, “I can’t be known. I can’t really let people in,” and so then we feel lonely, because we are not known, or I am not loved. People do not care about who I am. People do not love the real me. That is where loneliness creeps in. Many of us think it is safer to stay at a distance than to risk being known, and what Christ is calling us to in the church, I think is to be a place where we are known and loved, and here is the thing. I can’t fully know you unless you let yourself be fully known. That is part of it. It is that we struggle sometimes, and we feel lonely, and we feel isolated, and we look at the world and think they do not care, and that is absolutely true, and I am not

trying to make you the bad guy in your story, but I am asking the question, “Do you show up and allow yourself to be known?” because that is the factor that you can control, and here is the reality. Some of us are afraid to do that, because we are afraid of being rejected, or we are afraid of just living in admiration or being ignored, and here is the absolute reality of that. It will happen. It absolutely will happen in the family of God, because we are not perfect this side of heaven. We are just not, and as hard as I might try to love you and to pastor you well, I will still at some point let you down, but I can promise you I will do my best to know what I can about you and to love you as deeply as I can. How we choose to show up in this space matters. In Jesus, you do not have to choose between being known and being loved. You do not have to make that choice. Jesus is the end of hiding. That is where the gospel meets us.

In Psalm 139, it says that God knows you, and He knows your inner thoughts, and He knows what goes on in your world, and in that world, He still loves you. In Romans, it says that when you look at your life, and when you are still a sinner, Christ chose to die for you. God knows everything about you. Nothing you have ever done could be hidden from Him. He knows you fully, and He loves you fully. The church is the place that is supposed to reflect that to one another. The reality that we have from God is that Jesus encounters people, and He sees them all the way through, and He loves them all the way down.

I love this quote from Brennan Manning where he says this about loneliness: “Through his passion and death, Jesus carried away the essential sickness of the human heart and broke forever the deadly grip of hypocrisy on our souls. He has robbed our loneliness of its fatal power by traveling Himself to the far reaches of loneliness when He said, ‘My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? He has understood our ignorance, our weakness, and our foolishness, and granted pardon to us all. ‘Forgive them, Father, for they do not know what they are doing.’ He has made his pierced heart a safe place for every defeated cynic, every hopeless sinner, and every self-loathing derelict across the bands of time. The cross reveals that Jesus has conquered sin and death and that nothing, absolutely nothing, can separate us from the love of Christ.”

In Christ you no longer have to choose between being known and being loved. You are known all the way down and seen all the way through, and when that truth begins to sink into your soul, something happens. Something unlocks for you where you no longer have to perform quite as much. You do not have to manage your image quite as much. You do not have to stay hidden all of the time, because your identity is no longer built on what you do for people or what you have done or whether or not they approve of you. It is fully based on the reality that you have been accepted in Jesus Christ, and so the place where that idea begins to take us is that we can take small steps but courageous steps towards being known by others, and not recklessly, not all at once, but honestly, one conversation, one relationship, one cup of coffee in the lobby at a time. The goal is that the more we move towards communion with one another, that we become the kind of person who is known and loved and who helps others to experience that same kind of love too. As the psychologist said at the beginning, “Reaching out and showing up and building community are not optional. They are essential.” May that be true of Waterstone. Will you pray with me?

Heavenly Father, God, we come before you, and we ask that we would be a place, Lord, where the lonely are welcome, and that God, we would be a place where the lonely are seen and loved. Lord, I pray for those who are here in this room right now who are feeling that deep ache of loneliness, that reality of not quite being sure if they are known and if they are loved. God, for some of us, that is a deep wound that

goes back years. It is a part of our story. It is a part of the things that have happened to us, where we showed up in some way, maybe even as a child, and someone said to us, “Oh, you are too much. You are not worthy of love,” and God, we have been carrying that lie around with us in our hearts and in our minds, and it is leaving us in a place of deep longing and loneliness. God, I pray by the power of Jesus’ name that the reality of the gospel, what you have done to say that we are fully known and fully loved, God, may the power of that truth just seep into our souls right now, into our restless souls that are longing for connection. May we find that first and foremost in you, and then Father, for the places that we are feeling lonely in community, may someone just by the power of your Spirit reach out to us today. May they encounter us. May they say, “Hey, I see you, and I want to know you more.” God may this church be one where no one walks through these doors feeling lonely or feeling isolated. We know that we will not do it perfectly, so may we have grace for one another as we fail, but may we strive to be the family of our Lord Jesus Christ. It is in his name we pray, amen.

In a moment, we are going to transition into our business meeting, but I want to shepherd this moment well. I want to close this space with a psalm, as I said we would do for each and every sermon in this series. So, this is from Psalm 25. It is a psalm of David, and it says this: “Turn to me and be gracious to me, for I am lonely and afflicted. Relieve the troubles of my heart, and free me from my anguish. Look upon my affliction and my distress and take away all my sins. See how numerous my enemies are and how fiercely they hate me. Guard my life and rescue me. Do not let me be put to shame, for I take refuge in you.”

Lord God, if the statistics are true, and we know there are many people in this room who feel that quiet ache of loneliness, feeling unknown or unloved, God, I pray that this would be a place that would help them see the family of God in a new way, that Waterstone would be a place that accepts people just as they are, like you do, that we would begin to see people’s quirks and flaws and failures not as liabilities but as parts of people who are created in your image. God, may we be a people who show up and reach out to know others, and God, may we be a people who are so confident in the goodness of the gospel of Jesus Christ that we show up and allow ourselves to be known and to be loved. May that be true of us this week, and it is in Christ’s name we pray, amen.

46:10 minutes

Edited by Tom Kenaston

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