

A stylized landscape illustration. In the foreground, a dark gray grid pattern of squares recedes into the distance, leading towards a bright, glowing light source positioned between two dark gray mountain peaks. The sky is a gradient of blue, and the ground on either side of the path is a vibrant green. The overall scene suggests a journey or a path leading to a goal or a revelation.

Helping

or

Hindering?

David C. Hairabedian

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|---|---------------------------|
| <u>Are we helping or hindering?.....</u> | <u>1</u> |
| <u>Three contemporary examples</u> | <u>6</u> |
| <u>Are we helping, hindering, or blocking the path?</u> | <u>9</u> |
| <u>Conclusion</u> | <u>11</u> |

Are we helping or hindering?

Recently, while studying a passage of Scripture, the Holy Spirit asked me a convicting question: "Are you helping others get to Jesus or are you hindering them?" As I thought for a moment before answering, the Holy Spirit suddenly opened my eyes to the verses I was reading, revealing both the helpers and hinderers of God's kingdom. Shortly thereafter, I began to see both groups of people throughout the Bible. As we study together, I encourage you to ask yourself the same question, "Am I helping others get to Jesus or am I hindering them?"

One day as he was teaching, Pharisees and teachers of the law, who had come from every village of Galilee and from Judea and Jerusalem, were sitting there. And the power of the Lord was present for him to heal the sick. Some men came carrying a paralytic on a mat and tried to take him into the house to lay him before Jesus. When they could not find a way to do this because of the crowd, they went up on the roof and lowered him on his mat through the tiles into the middle of the crowd, right in front of Jesus. When Jesus saw their faith [the faith of the helpers], he said [to the paralytic], "Friend, your sins are forgiven." The Pharisees and the teachers of the law began thinking to themselves [hindering those seeking Jesus], "Who is this fellow who speaks blasphemy? Who can forgive sins but God alone?" Jesus knew what they were thinking and asked, "Why are you thinking these things in your hearts? Which is easier: to say, 'Your sins are forgiven,' or to say, 'Get up and walk'? But that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins...." He said to the paralyzed man, "I tell you, get up, take your mat and go home." Immediately he stood up in front of them, took what he had been

lying on and went home praising God. Everyone was amazed and gave praise to God. They were filled with awe and said, "We have seen remarkable things today."

Luke 5:17-26, NIV

This wonderful healing story reveals three types of people: (1) helpers, (2) church goers who block the way, and (3) hinderers [of those trying to get to Jesus]. In verse 18, the paralyzed man on the bed couldn't get to Jesus himself, but thank God for his helping friends. *"Some men came carrying a paralytic on a mat and tried to take him into the house to lay him before Jesus"* (vs. 18). Nothing indicates that these helpers had any formal training or Bible College degrees. Today we have many who are helpers in God's kingdom, bringing others to Jesus. All they know is how to take someone to Jesus, believing if they can simply get a person there, Jesus will do the rest.

These helpers represent many within the Body of Christ who invite, carry, or persuade others to come to church with them, trusting that Jesus will do the rest when they get there. Statistically, scores of people meet Jesus in this manner. Thank God for the helpers. Sadly, however, these helpers are often obstructed by other believers who block the needy person's path to Jesus. Notice the next verse, *"When they could not find a way to do this because of the crowd, they went up on the roof and lowered him on his mat through the tiles into the middle of the crowd, right in front of Jesus"* (vs. 19). Here, the crowd represents the many churchgoing people who are blocking the way of others getting to Jesus. They sit in church, warming a pew, taking up space, singing songs, and even shouting praises unto God (vs. 26).

They monopolize the pastor's time and dominate every group activity. However, they rarely receive anything from Jesus personally, and often block the way of others in the process. I say this because the story begins, *"And the power of the Lord*

was present for him to heal the sick" (vs. 17). Yet none of them received healing! Later, shortly before His death, Jesus spoke of them, saying *"...you did not know the time of your visitation"* (Luke 19:44, RSV).

It is interesting to note that Jesus' mission is *"...to seek and to save the lost"* (Luke 19:10, RSV). God anointed him in an earlier chapter for five things: (1) to preach the gospel to the poor, (2) to heal the broken hearted, (3) to proclaim [and demonstrate] deliverance unto the captives, (4) to restore sight to the blind, and (5) to set at liberty those that are bruised. (See Luke 4:18, KJV). Jesus was sent *"...to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord"* (Luke 4:19, RSV), which included all the above benefits of God's kingdom. This proclamation is still in force. *"And the power of the Lord was present for him to heal the sick"* (Luke 5:17, NIV). Yet all but one man and his friends missed their day of visitation (Luke 19:44). Can we be guilty at times of the same mistake? Can we be blocking the path of others seeking their touch from God? Are we helping others get to Jesus or are we hindering them?

The word for heal in this passage, *"And the power of the Lord was present for him to heal the sick"* (Luke 5:17, NIV), means more than just physical healing. It includes spiritual healing as well (see Strong's Concordance, #2390 (Greek), iamōai). In sum, Jesus had just been anointed by the Father for the five-fold ministry of: preaching the good news of salvation to the poor (imparting hope), healing those with broken hearts (emotional hurts and wounds), proclaiming deliverance (from addictions and demons), recovery of sight to the blind (both physically and spiritually), and freeing those that were beat up and bruised by sin, the world, the flesh, and Satan. *"And the power of the Lord was present for him to heal the sick."*

Yet, only one was healed; and he couldn't get to Jesus on his own! He needed help. God's helpers took him to a house. And notice, it wasn't only the man's faith that allowed Jesus to heal him, but the helpers' faith also. *"When Jesus saw their*

faith, he said, 'Friend, your sins are forgiven'' (vs. 20). Wow! What an opportunity we have as helpers! We can bring others to Jesus with our faith! And we don't need a seminary degree first! The apostle Paul confirmed this in his letter to the Corinthian church (one of the most carnal churches in the world at the time, and not well educated in the Scriptures). He said, "Look guys, (and gals), you are new creations in Christ, and God has given YOU the ministry of reconciliation" (see 1 Corinthians 5:17-20). If we are "in Christ," God has called us to be helpers with Him, bringing others to Jesus. How exciting! *"For we are laborers together with God"* (2 Corinthians 3:9, KJV).

Now that we've identified helpers and churchgoers who block the way of others, let's look at the third group of people in this healing account, the hinderers. The Scribes and Pharisees fall into this category, not only in this narrative, but also through most of the New Testament. They were the religious establishment of the time, the ones with the seminary degrees. They could quote the majority of the Old Testament from memory. They had been through many years of religious training, temple attendance, and even preached sermons of their own. They were teachers of the law (vs. 17), self-proclaimed experts on what to preach and teach.

Today, we might consider such people well-studied Bible scholars. Such men (and women) can discuss any passage of Scripture and quote from memory numerous verses relating to almost any subject. When a new preacher comes to town and appears on television, radio, or in print, some of these are the first ones to critique him or her for doctrinal accuracy. Jesus said of such people who misuse their knowledge, *"Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You give a tenth of your spices—mint, dill and cumin. But you have neglected the more important matters of the law—justice, mercy and faithfulness. You should have practiced the latter, without neglecting the former. You blind guides! You strain out a gnat but swallow a camel"* (Matthew 23:23-24, NIV). The true Scriptural litmus test of our walk with Jesus

is this; are we helping others get to Jesus, or are we hindering them? *"But wisdom is proved right by all her children"* (Luke 7:35, NIV). *"...although being a 'know-it-all' makes us feel important, what is really needed to build the church is love"* (1 Corinthians 8:1, LVB). Are we puffing ourselves up by tearing others down and blocking their path to Jesus, or are we using our gifts to build up the body of Christ?

Three contemporary examples

The morning after the Holy Spirit asked me the question, “Are you helping others get to Jesus or hindering them?” three distressing examples of Christians hindering others from getting to Jesus came to my attention. All three stories are unsolicited, first-hand accounts from different denominational backgrounds, confirming to me that this problem of well-meaning blockers and hinderers is still happening today.

Duane, a 74-year-old who came to prison for a small white-collar crime a year ago, shared the first example from the prison chapel pulpit that Sunday morning. In 1947, the Spirit of God led him into a Church of the Nazarene revival meeting where a visiting evangelist preached the gospel. Conviction came as the Word was proclaimed. He responded to the altar call and was marvelously born again. A few days later, the Lord spoke to his heart saying, “Go pray by a tree.” He obeyed and the Holy Spirit filled him. The heavens opened up, resulting in a powerful experience that forever changed his life. From that day forward, he never drank or smoked. In time, he met a wonderful girl in the congregation and the pastor married them shortly thereafter. They have been happily married for the last 56 years. Sadly, however, the pastor told him he had to “grow whiskers to be part of the congregation, as this was the godly thing to do.” This was contrary to the eighteen-year-old boy's understanding of what it took to be godly. He said, “I don't believe God wants me to grow whiskers.” The pastor excommunicated him and told him, “You will go to hell unless you grow whiskers and obey all the church doctrine and rules.” Half a century later, in prison, he finally returned to church fellowship. What fruit might God have borne through Duane had this pastor not added his rules to Christ's Gospel?

Rich shared this story in another prison service. He had fasted and prayed for his brother and sister-in-law for three

years. He had sent them letters, Christian tracts, and a video for them to watch. As a result, his brother gave his heart to Christ! The wife then agreed to try church! Rich, a prisoner, contacted his pastor to locate an affiliated Pentecostal congregation where his brother lived. He wanted to assure sound doctrine and “the full counsel of God.” The new church called his brother and told him where the church people met, about an hour's drive away. They also informed him that if his wife came, “...she would be required to wear a dress because we don't allow pants on women in our church fellowship.” They chose not to attend church. The obstacle of church regulations offended and hindered the wife who was on the brink of meeting Jesus. I wonder if the prostitute who came to Jesus, anointed his feet with her tears, and wiped his feet with her hair was appropriately dressed when she came to Jesus that day at the home of the Pharisees? If I remember correctly, they wanted to throw her out! Jesus instead received her, just as she was, and said, *“Your sins are forgiven”* (Luke 7:37-50, RSV). Are we helping or hindering others from getting to Jesus? Rich has returned to fasting and praying for his family's salvation.

Kenny relates the third story. He spent the last 22 years on drugs. Eight months ago, he was supernaturally delivered during a prison church service. At age eighteen, Kenny was playing his guitar, writing songs, and singing unto the Lord before a Baptist congregation. A visiting evangelist called him out before the church and told him his long hair was shameful and he needed to cut it to be acceptable to minister in song before the congregation. Kenny responded, “Samson had long hair and was a judge over Israel.” The evangelist was stunned, but continued to publicly berate the young believer. Kenny left the fellowship, backslid, and ended up in prison two decades later. Jesus has harsh words for such people: *“Whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him if a great millstone were hung round his neck and he were thrown into the sea.”* (Mark 9:42, RSV). Are we helping or hindering others from getting to Jesus? Happily, Kenny is again serving the Lord;

back in Bible study, inviting others to meet Jesus, singing in the choir, and glorifying God.

Are the hinderers only of the Pharisee and Sadducee lot, or can disciples of Jesus also fall in this category? *"One of his disciples, John, told him one day, 'Teacher, we saw a man using your name to cast out demons; but we [disciples] told him not to, for he isn't one of our group.' 'Don't forbid [hinder] him!' Jesus said. 'For no one doing miracles in my name will quickly turn against me. Anyone who isn't against us is for us'"* (Mark 9:38-40, LVB). Today, we might say, "Jesus, others were casting out devils in your name, but they weren't part of our church denomination, so we forbade them." Jesus says, "Stop hindering MY WORK, for he that is not against us is for us" (vs. 40).

A similar example might be, "I heard a friend of mine was going to a healing crusade given by a TV evangelist. I told him it was all just a fraud and a fake, and OF THE DEVIL!" Jesus faced the same bad publicity during His ministry. "Then a demon-possessed man -- he was both blind and unable to talk -- was brought to Jesus, and Jesus healed him so that he could both speak and see. The crowd was amazed. 'Maybe Jesus is the Messiah!' they exclaimed. But when the Pharisees heard about the miracle they said, 'He can cast out demons because he is Satan, king of devils.'" (Matthew 12:22-24, LVB). "...there is nothing new under the sun" (Ecclesiastes 1:9, RSV). Are we helping or hindering?

Are we helping, hindering, or blocking the path?

Over the last 13 years, I've witnessed Christians helping others get to Jesus in all kinds of ways. I've been amazed at the simplicity of the ways in which this help has been accomplished. It has been a shoulder to cry on when someone has lost a loved one, a meal when they were hungry, help to write a letter, a smile when no one else cared, or offering a heartfelt prayer with them, taking them into the presence of God.

Someone once said, "People don't care how much you know until they know how much you care." Often, I believe doing the gospel is the prerequisite to preaching the gospel. St. Francis of Assisi said, "Preach the gospel at all times, when necessary use words." The Apostle Paul told the Corinthian church, "*You yourselves are our letter, written on our hearts, known and read by everybody*" (2 Corinthians 3:2, NIV). I believe one of the greatest ways in which we can help others get to Jesus is by living our lives unto Jesus. When we follow Jesus moment by moment, others can see Jesus in us and automatically are exposed to His presence. If we can just get others in the presence of Jesus, we can trust Jesus to do the rest. Remember, we may be the only Bible people ever read. Peter wrote that a believing wife can lead an unbelieving husband to Jesus by her godly lifestyle, without nagging, without criticizing. "*Your godly lives will speak to them better than any words*" (1 Peter 3:1, LVB).

I've also witnessed many others who have hindered people from getting to Jesus with theological arguments, debates, legalism, and expository knowledge that confuses the simple and drives them from Christ and fellowship. Consider a sad story that occurred in a church some ten years ago and is probably reoccurring in churches across the land today. A

dear three-day-old newborn believer was asked to share her testimony before the congregation. She got up before her new church family and excitedly shared what the Lord had done for her; saving her, delivering her from her past lifestyle, and forgiving all her sins. She then quoted a Scripture partially out of context (being only three days old in the faith and not fully understanding the passage). Nonetheless, congregation understood what she meant and that her spirit was right. They clapped, thanked, and encouraged her for sharing what Jesus had done for her. She was about to sit down when a well-studied man in the congregation stood up and asked her to remain. All eyes looked towards the man. Was he going to prophesy some great word of encouragement to her? Had the Spirit of God given him something that would build this child in the faith to the next level? Had her testimony touched his heart and he wanted to thank her for her zeal and excitement in Christ, which reminded him of when he was first born again? None of the above.

Instead, he proceeded to correct her misquotation of the scripture verse, expounding on context, nuances of the Greek language, and the hermeneutical interpretations. The final blow, "In the future, if you don't understand the verse it would be best if you didn't quote anything at all, lest you lead others astray." She was crushed! She had been slain by his knowledge. *"...although being a 'know-it-all' makes us feel important, what is really needed to build the church is love"* (1 Corinthians 8:1, LVB). It was three more years before this dear Sister would even speak in a Bible study, and five more years before she was willing to stand before the congregation and sing fearful that she might lead someone astray. How sad. Jesus said about such men puffed up with knowledge, *"But if someone causes one of these little ones who believe in me to lose faith--it would be better for that man if a huge millstone were tied around his neck and he were thrown into the sea."* (Mark 9:42, LVB). Are we helping, hindering, or blocking the path?

Conclusion

In reality, most of us exhibit traits from each of these three groups at different times. Sometimes, we are helpers, bringing others into the presence of Jesus by inviting them to church, giving a smile, a morsel of food, or a banquet dinner in His name. At other times, we can be like the disciples, forbidding others from casting out devils in His name or speaking against other ministers, hindering the work of God. While at other times, we may just be blocking the path. "Hey, that's my parking place," or "That's where I sit. Who is that new guy? Get him out of my spot! Everyone knows I sit there, and have for the last eight years!" Jesus is patient with us, isn't He? Thank God for grace! Grace to be forgiven and grace to change. Maybe we've seen ourselves as hinderers or just blocking the path. If so, God forgives us and calls us alongside to be His helper, bringing others to Jesus.

Let us pray:

"Father, I confess that I have both knowingly and unknowingly hindered your work at times. I have criticized and spoken against other ministers and I repent. I have taken the knowledge you have given me and I have wounded others. At times, I have been judgmental and driven some from fellowship. Sometimes, I have sat in the pew, not as a servant, but as one hungry to be served, even at the expense of others, and I ask you to forgive me for blocking the path of others getting to Jesus. Help me to see how you are working so I can join you in bringing others to Jesus' feet so they can be healed, saved, and set free. Then, raise them up also to be co-laborers in the Gospel until everyone has the opportunity to meet and know Jesus as Savior! Amen."

About the author



In 1989 David C. Hairabedian conspired to steal a jet airplane to import drugs for the Columbian cartel. As a result, he spent the next 20 years incarcerated in the U.S. Federal Prison System. At age 26, while in a dirty prison cell inside the super-max building at Leavenworth Penitentiary David experienced a visitation from the Lord calling him to deep repentance, salvation and also into the ministry. David responded to this call. The vision David received inspired the founding of HEART of America Prison Ministries, a ministry that provides first quality leather-bound study Bibles, Christian resource materials and a discipleship newsletter to those behind bars. HEART currently serves approximately 5,000 inmates in more than 800 facilities. David is a regular contributor to its newsletter. He has his Bachelor's Degree in Theology from Zoe University. He has authored more than thirty teachings, booklets, and tracts. He has a paralegal degree and is presently in his final semesters' work in International Business.

From 1990 to 2008 the Lord has used David mightily to educate and build up the body of Christ behind bars. Through the power of the Holy Spirit and the grace of God, he has ministered and preached at several facilities around the Midwest. David was released in September 2008 and is currently ministering in churches around the Kansas City area. David has a powerful and compelling testimony to share with not only the Body of Christ, but our young people, as well.

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If you would be interested in reading more of David's or Jeff's teachings, or for speaking/preaching engagements, please contact HEART of America Prison Ministries at PO Box 1685 Independence, MO 64055 or visit our website www.HeartPrisonMinistries.org.

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