

## When Helping Hurts

We want to bring hope and offer practical solutions. But what happens when our words, our encouragement, and our help is taken as trite, non-genuine, invalidating, or worse yet - traumatizing? What happens when our helping, actually hurts, and what can we, as helpers, do to prevent harm?

### Why do these statements get misunderstood?

- Pain clouds perspective/reality.
- Deceit twists truth.
- Abuse leaves one in flight, fright, freeze.
- Trauma challenges theology.
- Grief is not linear.
- Addiction is not logical.
- Secrecy results in shame.
- Human nature/biology is to do what it takes to feel good.
- Anxiety/Depression can be the result of chemical imbalances.
- Emotionally dysregulation cannot hear logic.
- Unrequested wisdom is often received as judgement/criticism.

### What might people hear?

What is said	What is heard
Stay married at all cost	I must live with abuse, adultery, porn
Sex before marriage is bad (chosen or not)	I am damaged goods
Leaders must be perfect	I must be secret with my struggles
Keep that issue private	Live in secret
Increase your faith/trust God	I must not be a real Christian
Follow scripture	I'm not good enough
Being gay is a sin	I am a sin
Love the sinner, hate the sin	I will always be a sinner
God has a plan	To hurt me or leave me
God is your father	Who is (fill in the blank like physical father was/is)
Worship more or get in a life group	I can earn freedom, joy or hope
Medication is a crutch	I must be weak
Sameness versus oneness in marriage	I can't be different from my spouse
We can't question God's plan	I am irrelevant
We shouldn't be angry with God	My feelings don't matter
Be the Proverbs 31 woman	I don't measure up
Suicide is weak and selfish, and a lack of faith	I must be weak if I'm feeling despair

### Try this instead:

- I can't imagine what you're going through.
- My hearts breaks with you.
- I'm sorry that you are hurting.
- I appreciate you trusting me with this problem.
- I'm so sorry, I don't know what to say right now.
- I realize no words will take away the pain.
- How can I best support you right now?
- This is so difficult.
- I'm honored you're sharing this with me.
- We don't have to talk; I'm happy to just sit here with you.

### Reminders:

- Have an awareness that intent and impact are not the same.

- Remove the pressure to be perfect and all knowing and bring our own humanity.
- Remember there is no tangible answer that removes suffering.
- Give the gift of “being with” versus talking to.
- Recognize that sometimes less words is better, especially when someone is emotional.
- Realize it can take time before someone asks for wisdom, or is able to receive truth.
- Remember we can't control how others react, but we can control our cadence, and use of scripture.
- Become a trauma informed church.
- Rely on partnerships.

### **Resources**

- Book - Gentle and Lowly (Dane Ortlund)
- Book - The Soul of Desire (Curt Thompson)
- Trauma in America, Barna report (<https://www.barna.com/research/pastors-trauma-care/>)