

Don't HIT Blind People
Isaiah 42:6-7

INTRODUCTION

► Dumb and Dumber Clip

Good morning! My name is Patrick Gibbs and I am one of the pastors here at MVBC. Pastor Bob has the day off this morning.

I don't need a show of hands, but was anybody else disturbed by that video clip? We laugh because we think it's too far fetched to be real. But I hope it created a little tension too. The tension that comes from wanting to laugh because it is funny, and feeling guilty for laughing, because you know it is mean. That's good. You should feel that tension. And my goal this morning is to send you home feeling a very similar tension.

But I need to make some disclaimer statements. Number one: I am not making fun of blind people to be mean. I grew up with two blind parents. My dad has been totally blind since he was seven year's old and my mom has been able to see about this far for most of my life. And growing up, I did some pretty cruel things to my blind parents. Most of this stuff is funny to my family, and none of it is made up. And Yes, I got permission to share all these stories. But when we are done, I hope these stories create some tension in your mind.

Number two: I am going to be referring to non-Christians, or people outside the church, as spiritually blind. I don't mean that to be derogatory. It is no more derogatory that saying, "my dad is blind." There are several places in the Bible where God calls people spiritually blind. I don't feel superior to my dad because I can see and he can't. Likewise, I don't feel superior to someone outside the church because I believe in Jesus and they don't. We just see things differently.

So, there are my disclaimers. I hope you aren't offended and hang in there with me.

Like the video clip, I did some mean stuff to my parents.

When I was little, I snuck out of my house while I supposed to be sleeping. I went next door and had popcorn and soda at my grandmas house before she called my mom to say I had escaped from my house.

I set stuff inside the house on fire twice. The first time, I was home alone with my dad. I put my sister's brand new Christmas shoes in the Rubbermaid trash can and set it on fire. My dad called my uncle who lived next door and calmly said, "Could you come over. I think Pat might have started a fire."

Another time, my little sister wasn't feeling well, so I climbed up on the stove to reach the medicine cupboard. I fed her an entire bottle of baby aspirin. She was 3 years old.

On still another occasion, I got in my grandma's car that was parked on the street and put it in gear and rolled it down the street into the back of my grandpa's car.

Every one of these things I did was before I was 4.

Some of these things I did because I was an ADHD brat. So, if you have a child with ADHD, they could grow up to be a pastor. But other things I was able to do because my parents simply couldn't see me doing them. And things did get a little weirder.

When I was in high school, my mom had to have one of her eyes removed and she has a fake eye.

One time driving home from somewhere I pulled into the parking space at our apartment complex a little too fast and I hit the curb and I see my mom do this. Yep! You guessed it. Hitting the curb popped her eye out. That was weird.

On another occasion, I was in my parent's bedroom and was sitting on the opposite side of the bed as my mom and I heard her drop something. She said, "Patrick, can you come pick up my eye; I think it went under the bed." Now, I don't know about you, but I don't like looking under beds anyways, especially when I **know** there an eye under there looking back. I said "No." I made my sister come do it. That was a little weird.

There are very few things like walking into the bathroom at your house and seeing false teeth, hearing aids and a fake eye on the counter. There's half a face sitting on the counter every morning. I got to admit; it's a little weird.

But I will say, my parents made excellent chaperones for dates.

If you have a Bible, turn to Isaiah 42.

I learned very early on, my parents couldn't see. From the smallest age, I knew to keep my toys off the floor. I learned how to lead blind people around. I also learned I could get away with some things. And as I got a little older still, I learned what not being able to see really meant for my parents.

► Let's read Isaiah 42:6-7.

^{NLT} **Isaiah 42:6** "I, the LORD, have called you to demonstrate my righteousness. I will take you by the hand and guard you, and I will give you to my people, Israel, as a symbol of my covenant with them. And you will be a light to guide the nations. ► ⁷ You will open the eyes of the blind. You will free the captives from prison, releasing those who sit in dark dungeons.

In verse 6, God lists the things He does for us. Things like- He calls us, helps us, guards us and makes us a light to the nations. But notice what the Lord says in verse 7: **You** will open the eyes of the blind. **You** will free captives; **you** will release those who sit in darkness. That struck me as odd. Why doesn't verse 7 continue with the things God does? Why does He say, "You will. . ." do these things"? The answer to that question is actually our big idea for the week. ► Here is it. . . because God **wants** to use us.

So, what might that look like? ► For the next few minutes, I'd like to talk to you about how we can help spiritually blind people. I actually call this, "Don't HIT Blind People" because we are going to look at three things this morning that get in the way of God using us. And I learned these things growing up with physically blind people, but they seem to apply to the spiritually blind as well.

So, here we go.

When I was little, I used to think it was fun to hide from my dad. My favorite place to hide was under the table. Dad would walk around the house calling my name and I would crawl under the dining room table and prop myself up on a chair and just watch as he walked around the house yelling for me. My mistake though, was that I thought **no one** could see me. And it took a few times of the relatives next-door coming over to find me that I realized that just mom and dad were like that.

So, number one: ► Don't HIDE.

If a blind person was lost and calling for help, would you stand quietly so as not to get involved? Probably not; we would all agree that's mean. And yet, some of us hide from spiritually blind all the time. We prop ourselves up under our own little table of life and hide.

Frankly, some of us hide because we don't want to be around people outside the church. The drama, the sin, the messiness. Some of us think that somehow their blindness is gonna rub off on us. I can assure you, certain kinds of blindness might be hereditary, but it ain't contagious.

Some of us hide by being too busy. The commitment required to get to know someone well enough to lead them just isn't a priority.

Some of us frankly may be too embarrassed to say we are a Christian. Or we are afraid of our reputation. On 2 separate occasions, I have worked with Christians who were "Jerks for Jesus." They were in your face obnoxious. And so hiding was easier because I didn't want that reputation.

But hiding is mean. It is mean to do to people who can't physically see, and it is also mean to do to people who don't see spiritually.

We sit under the table of life with our hands on our chin and we watch people wander around. We see they are alone, but we hide. We see they are looking for something, but we hide. Or worse yet, we sit in the comfort of our little church here in Moon Valley and we hide. We fill our life with Christian friends and Christian activities and safe church events to the point we've become a church for church people and to hell with the blind people- literally.

It's mean for a little kid to hide from his blind parents, but it's equally cruel to go to school and work and even home and watch blind people fend for themselves and not participate in their world.
Don't hide, because God wants to use us.

But many of us don't hide. People know you are a Christian. You aren't hiding. But maybe you aren't leading as well as you could be. And if people know you are Christian, then you are leading them. You might not like it; you might not feel real good about it; you might not even think about it. But you are.

One day when I was 7 or 8, I was walking through a grocery store. As I walked down an aisle, there was a display for powdered tea. Displays like that are in just about every aisle. I cleared the display just fine; in fact, I had a couple of feet to spare. The problem was, I had my dad on my arm. He hit that display head on and glass jars and powder shattered everywhere. Oops!

That brings us to the second point. ►Don't ignore. Let me explain. Why did I run my dad into the tea display? It wasn't because I was hiding. It wasn't because I didn't want to be helpful. It was because I wasn't paying attention. I was wrapped up in my own little world and forgot I was actually leading a blind man around.

One day my sister was leading my dad to the store. She took a short cut underneath some stairs in our apartment complex. She cleared the stairs just fine; dad slammed his face into the steel beam holding up those stairs. She just wasn't paying attention.

It seems to me we should be helping blind people navigate the obstacles in this world, not running them into them. So, let's think for a moment; what might be some obstacles that exist for a spiritually blind person?

I think one obstacle is outsiders' perception of Christians. ► In his new book, *UnChristian*, researcher David Kinnaman breaks down some recent research about the way outsiders view Christianity. Ninety-one percent said we are anti-homosexual; 87% said we are judgmental; 85% said we are hypocritical (meaning we say one thing and do another); and 75% think we are too involved in politics. Now, whether we like it or not, blind people don't see Christianity as a solution. That's an obstacle. So, the question is, do the things we say and do help navigate that obstacle or do we run people into it?

I think another obstacle people face is their own guilt for their own mistakes. Do the things we say help navigate that guilt or run them into it?

The most favorable response about Christianity from *unChristian* was that 82% said Christianity teaches the same basic idea as other religions. I think that's an obstacle. Christianity should teach faith alone in Christ alone. That's not the same basic idea as other religions. So, do our conversations with outsiders build up that obstacle or guide people around that obstacle.

► Some of us ignore out of ignorance. We just didn't realize what we were doing.

One of the very first times my wife led my dad, she ran him into a mirror sticking off the side of a big truck. She was paying attention, but she had never led a blind person before. She didn't know what obstacles to look for.

But some of us ignore out of apathy. About 5 years ago, I was leading my dad through a restaurant. And I have been leading my dad for more than 30 years. I cut a corner too close and ran him into the corner of the wall. Split his head wide open. I've been doing this a long time, but I was wrapped in my own little world and totally forgot dad was there. And that's where many of us are. We've been believing in Jesus for a long time. We forget what it was like to be blind. We get absorbed in our own world and forget that God is counting on us to open eyes that are blind. Whether we are ignoring out of ignorance or apathy, the result is still the same; we are running people into obstacles instead of helping them past them. It's not that we don't care, and it's not like we don't help. But the commitment to stay involved and pay attention is not a priority for many of us right now and it needs to be. It needs to be for me; it needs to be for you and it needs to be for us- collectively as a church. We haven't been guiding blind people very well, and we need to get better. Don't ignore, because God wants to use us.

And that brings us to number 3.

Probably the most popular story my family likes to tell is a time my dad was coming home from next door. We lived next door to my grandparents, so my dad had learned to walk back and forth with no cane or anything. So as dad was walking along the side of our house on a sidewalk, I decided to see what would happen if I stretched the garden hose across the sidewalk about knee high. Luckily, my grandma saw me out the window and yelled at me to put down that hose.

Fortunately, grandma caught me in time. Number 3 is ► Don't trip.

When we ignore people, we aren't paying attention to obstacles that already exist. Tripping them is a little different. This is where *we* actually put the obstacle in the way of someone believing or seeing God. Point 2 asks the question, "Am I helping blind overcome the obstacles created by other people?" This point asks the question, "Am I the one creating an obstacle?"

There are lots of hoses we can stretch out in front of people. Politics, certain sins, apathy, our own arrogance. But there is also a hose that seems to be the most damaging; it is the hose of our own hypocrisy- our own actions, lifestyle and choices. Are we living out what we say we believe? Do the people who know you say, "He or she is that way because they have Jesus in their life?" Or do they think, "If that's what Christianity does for you, I'd rather not participate." And I have a theory about hypocrisy. I don't think people stumble over the fact that we say one thing and do another. I think people stumble when we say one thing and act like we don't do another. Everyone is hypocritical sometimes. But are we up front enough and humble enough and bold enough to say, "I'm sorry. I messed up."

Do some Christians struggle with anger? Sure. Do angry Christians sometimes go off on people at work? Sure. Imagine for a moment that 2 Christians with an anger problem go off on someone at work. One apologizes and asks for forgiveness. The other blames someone else for making them angry. I don't believe the average person in America views both of those people as a hypocrite. Just the one that acts like he doesn't have a problem. Our own hypocrisy is a huge hose we stretch across the sidewalk.

Don't trip people, because God wants to use you.

Conclusion: So, what do we do with this? We started this morning by talking about the mean things you can do to a blind person. I think it's safe to say that when I hid from, ignored or tripped by blind dad, you would call that mean. But I would challenge us that we are just as mean when we hide from, ignore and trip the spiritually blind people we encounter on a regular basis.

If you are hiding your belief in Jesus, I'd like to challenge you to come out of the closet. God wants to use you. If you have just gotten a little careless, I'd like you to say sorry and try to pay attention. And I would challenge all of us to ask ourselves, "Have I been tripping people?" "Am I putting things in the way of people believing in Jesus for eternal life?" May today serve as the sound of my grandma's voice yelling at you to "put down that hose."

Whether we have been hiding, ignoring or tripping, I want God to break our heart for the blind people in our community. I want us to experience the tension created by knowing and feeling that God *wants* to use us to help blind people see. And if you take this challenge, I would love to hear the stories of how you tried to stop hiding, ignoring and tripping.