

**AGAPE HOUSE OF WORSHIP
WEDNESDAY BIBLE STUDY**

Breaking down the Barriers

Wednesday, December 13, 2023

Scriptural Reference: Mark 2:3-5; 1 Corinthians 12:12; 22-23 Facilitator: Pastor Genevieve Kumapley

Ref: Joni & Friends International Ministry

Introduction: Tragically, throughout the ages and in many parts of the world today people with disabilities are looked upon as mistakes or those who have been cursed, the result of personal sin or the sins of their parents or ancestors. As a result, they are outcasts, rejected and isolated. In Liberia, a man with a physical disability has been lying in bed in his back bedroom for seven years, living in isolation with no hope as an outcast of his community. In China, a young man is crawling on the ground and begging on the streets so that he may get something to eat, yet many ignore him as if he did not exist. In Romania, a child with a mental disability has been abandoned by her family and lives in an orphanage because they believe she has been cursed.

When you hear about situations like that what are your thoughts?

Are these people valuable to Father God and our Lord Jesus Christ?

“Some men came, bringing to him a paralytic, carried by four of them. Since they could not get him to Jesus because of the crowd, they made an opening in the roof above Jesus and, after digging through it, lowered the mat the paralyzed man was lying on. When Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralytic, Son your sins are forgiven.” Mark 2:3-5

In the ministry of Jesus Christ on earth, he performed many miracles, many were centered around healing of the sick and the disabled. Jesus commanded his disciples to do likewise by empowering with the Holy Spirit. He drew many people to himself as he healed them. Throughout the gospels, it is noted that those he healed had the faith to be healed and they were also at the right place at the right time. Some got to him by themselves, others were taken to him. Here we see a wonderful picture of four men of faith (who believed in Jesus) overcome obstacles—the crowd and barriers, the roof—and made a hole through the roof to bring their paralyzed friend to Jesus. Jesus commended the faith of the four men and forgave the paralyzed man.

What does it mean to have a disability?

Who are the disabled? WHO estimates 16% of world population are disabled. About 1.3 billion people, or 1 out of 6. In the US, 48.9 million people are disabled: That’s 20 percent. Many people with disabilities are excluded from schools, churches, and opportunities to work, as well as poverty reduction programs and HIV and AIDS information and services. As many as 80% of working-age people with disabilities are unemployed. They make up 15–20 % of the poorest communities. They live marginalized, in isolation, often beg for survival. Disabled adults and children are three times more likely to be victims of sexual violence and rape. Other factors, such as physical dependence, life in institutions, and lack of access to legal rights, also make them particularly vulnerable to infection and abuse.

Q. What barriers and obstacles do you see in bringing people with disabilities to Jesus Christ? And how can we remove these barriers?

What is the bible’s view of disabilities? - Gen 1:26-27; Col 1:15-16, Ps 139:13-16; Jer 1:5, Ex 4:11

- All humans are created in the image of God (Genesis 1:26-27, 5:1-2)
 - Regardless of gender, race, physical or intellectual ability, all people are equally made in God’s image. Sin and the effects of the fall blur but do not erase this unshakeable basis of the value of all human life. Even after the fall, God prohibits murder and calls humanity to fill and care for creation as stewards because we are all made in His image (Genesis 9:6-7).
 - We see that God created us as spiritual beings in His image, forms our physical being while we were in our mother’s womb. God tells us we are all fearfully and wonderfully made, and all His works are wonderful. (ps 139:13-16) Whether we have a physical or mental disability, all of us in our uniqueness, with our physical, mental, and spiritual abilities, are beautifully and wonderfully made for His purposes. What God sees as wonderfully made is different than what man sees. Man looks at the outward man and what he does; God looks at the heart of man and who he is—one who is created in His image for His glory. There are no disabled souls!
- Disability is part of God’s sovereign purpose (Exodus 4:10-16)
 - The law protects people with disabilities (Deuteronomy 27:18, Leviticus 19:14) and includes them in the people of God.

- Inclusion is modeled and mandated by Jesus Christ (Luke 4:18); Isaiah 61:1-3)
 - The Gospel of Luke shows Jesus fulfilling this mission by intentionally reaching out to the margins of society: to women, Gentiles, the poor, and people with disabilities.
- Disability is not the result of personal or parental sin (John 9)
 - ‘As he went along, he saw a man blind from birth. 2 His disciples asked him, “Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?” 3 “Neither this man nor his parents sinned,” said Jesus, “but this happened so that the works of God might be displayed in him.” John 9:1–3
 - Jesus shows his disciples that disability is an opportunity for God’s glory to be revealed. In fact, the man born blind is better able to see Jesus (in both physical and spiritual senses) than the Pharisees.
- The church has many different members and gifts (1 Cor. 12:22-26)
 - Diversity is part of God’s design, each member exercising their spiritual gifts for the good of the whole. Contrary to our expectations, “some parts of the body that seem weakest and least important are actually the most necessary” (1 Corinthians 12:22, NLT).

What about the issue of sickness because of the curse?

Disability has often been misunderstood to be the result of punishment or a curse because one’s personal sin, ancestor’s sin, or demonization. But God’s word is contrary to man’s belief. Being born with a disability or becoming disabled is not the result of a curse but just one of the many effects from the fall of man (original sin of Adam) that gave birth to sin, sickness, disease, and death on the earth. It is not the result of one’s personal, family, or ancestor’s sin. Jesus has already paid the price for all mankind.

“Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us (for it is written, ‘Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree’), that the blessing [salvation/ freedom from sin] of Abraham might come upon the Gentiles in Christ Jesus, that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith.” Galatians 3:13–14

Q: What about the Issue of Healing and Demonization?

Out of the 37 recorded miracles of Jesus in the New Testament, three were people Jesus raised from the dead and nine were miracles which broke the natural laws of physics—including turning water into wine, feeding the 5000, walking on water and calming a storm. There were five related to demonization and required deliverances. The remaining miracles involved people with disabilities physical issues such as blindness, deafness, paralysis, a withered hand, and leprosy.

Q: How do we pray for healing for people affected by disability?

The Bible clearly teaches us to pray for the sick and the suffering. (Mark 6:13, James 5:14, Mark 16:18). God has revealed Himself as Jehovah Rapha (The Lord Our Healer) and He will heal sickness, disease, and perform creative miracles according to His sovereign purposes.

God Desires His Church to Reach Disabled People Luke 14:15–23. Parable of the great supper.

- Do not look at the person’s impairment; look into the eyes and smile.
- Reach out and touch the person, if not with a handshake, then with a hand on the shoulder. Do not pat a person’s head.
- Do not shout at a blind man; he can hear you.
- Use a pencil and paper to communicate with a deaf person. If they cannot read, you can draw pictures.
- Communicate with the disabled person as you would anyone else, asking about family, home, or other interests. Do not talk only about disability.

God desires disabled to serve his kingdom 1 Corinthians 12:12, 22-23

What Jesus did when he encountered those with disabilities reveals the heart of God for people with disabilities and an indication of the priority, He gave them. Jesus went out of His way to encounter and include people with disabilities, because He knew how much they may contribute to any family and how vital every individual is to their community.

Conclusion:

In the story of man of the paralyzed man, the friends overcame barriers and obstacles to bring their disabled friend to Jesus so that he would receive forgiveness of sin, just as God desires for all mankind. Jesus desires to see this story continue all around the world until He comes again— that a people of faith (His Church) will overcome all obstacles and barriers to bring people with disabilities to Jesus so that their sins may be forgiven, and they can receive His free gift of salvation and eternal life. Breaking down barriers and seeing the value of each person helps us to become the true family that God intends us to be (Mark 2:3-5 and 1 Corinthians 12:22-23).