

God's Story of Disability: The Unfolding Plan from Genesis to Revelation

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ABSTRACT

A salvation historical account of the Bible's understanding of disability from Genesis to Revelation demonstrates God's heart for people affected by disability. In the Old Testament, God creates humanity without disability, makes gracious provision for disability in the law, and promises hope for people with disabilities in the prophets. In the New Testament, Jesus offers hope and a way for people with disabilities, which reveals God's heart for people affected by disabilities and provides a model for the church. Myths about people affected by disabilities are disproven, and reasons for ministry to, with, and among people affected by disabilities are given.

Keywords: *salvation history, Old Testament, New Testament Biblical perspective on disability, disability ministry*

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God has a story. From Genesis to Revelation, salvation history displays the plans of God's heart, His mission. The story includes disabilities for they play pivotal roles in God's bringing people to Himself. Familiarly, His glory and our worship are at the very center.¹ Although entire books have been written on small details of disability in Scripture, the whole story from creation to eternity needs to be told. It is, at heart, the Gospel of Jesus Christ, and a basis for praise. In our study, we explore the Bible's perspective on disability as it develops in salvation history.²

Although references to disability are scattered throughout Scripture, perhaps surprisingly, the topic does not appear prominently. In fact, when compared with many other matters, the Bible has little to say directly about disability.³ One reason is that God wove His heart's concern and tender care for those with disabilities into the fabric of society. It does not stand out because it was commonplace. But Scripture also gives us encouraging insight into God's provision for people with disabilities whom He loves.⁴

God Gave Us a Beginning Without Disability (Genesis-Exodus)

1. In the Beginning, There Was No Disability.

When God's created couple, Adam and Eve, first willfully disobeyed Him, sin entered the world and brought pain, suffering, disability, even death with it (Gen. 3:1-24). Scripture calls this painful reality "the curse" (Rev. 22:3). It is very important to remember that people have disabilities because of the curse on all creation. Even the animal kingdom has disabilities.

2. As Creator, God Assumes Responsibility for Disabilities.

Responsibility means that God is not just the cause, but the upholder, enabler, and final rescuer of people with disabilities. Now *that* is responsibility! This perspective differs considerably from simply blaming God for disability, which would be serious error. When Moses wanted to explain to God why he was incapable of serving Him due to some in-ability in his speech, the Lord said to him, "Who has made man's mouth? Who makes him mute, or deaf, or blind? Is it not I, the LORD?" (Exod. 4:11).⁵ This important verse not only addresses God's role in disabilities, it also sets the stage for His provision *through* His people.⁶

Although greatly disappointing, it is important to get the disability perspective of other people in the ancient world before we focus on God's

people. Among Israel's neighbors, perspectives on disabilities varied considerably. Treatment ranged from completely rejecting and mistreating people with disabilities to worshipping them. Sadly, rejection was the norm. Most babies with disabilities were left to die by exposure shortly after birth. If they survived they were treated as outcasts and consigned to a miserable life of begging, prostitution, and in general, being taken advantage of. Usually, they suffered a premature death. It was anyone's worst nightmare.

The other extreme for persons born with a disability was that they might be worshipped as supernatural beings due primarily to their abnormal behavior or appearance. At least one Egyptian king with a disability was worshipped for having a condition that left him disfigured. Rather than a poverty-stricken social outcast, he was pampered, but still an outcast. Whether rejected completely or worshipped, people with disabilities were not accepted. We have come a long way, by God's grace. But we are not yet at full acceptance.

This confused treatment resulted from an incorrect understanding of what caused disabilities. In the early period some call 'pre-scientific,' those who rejected God did not understand the true causes of disabilities. The ancients typically blamed disabilities on sin or some sort of offense against their gods, which meant that people with disabilities or their parents were thought to be suffering for something they had done wrong.

God's people differed considerably from their contemporaries in their understanding of the causes of disability and their treatment of persons with disabilities.⁷ Although most did not understand disabilities from scientific perspectives any better than their neighbors who rejected God, they reasoned that God cared about all people, disabled or not, and so should they.⁸ In fact, God was so concerned about people with disabilities that He asked His people Israel to help those not able to help themselves. From the earliest days of God's people, His focus was on seeing them grow spiritually to become committed worshippers.

3. As God's Creatures, We Groan with Pain and Sadness for Disability to Be Healed.

Disability is a high price of living in a sin-cursed world. As Paul reminds us, all creation, including people with disabilities, "groan" in suffering as we wait for perfect redemption (Rom. 8:19-25). Regardless of how blessed we appear, we are all still in pain this side of heaven. But we also know that "God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purposes" (Rom. 8:28). That calling includes disability.

God's Gracious Law Makes Provision for Disability (Exodus-Deuteronomy)

1. God's People Need Protection by His Law.

People with disabilities were considered part of the larger group called “the needy” or “the afflicted,” linked with vulnerability and poverty.⁹ This included the mentally challenged who—though not named as such—were judged by their loss of self-control (Olyan, 2008, p.62). The group included those who might pass in and out of disability status several times in their lives and acknowledged God's sovereign hand was involved in giving and removing the disability.¹⁰ In fact, everyone entered this category sooner or later if they lived to old age.¹¹

2. God Tells His People in His Law to Care for Those with Disabilities.

This included punishing those who oppress and rewarding those who rescue and assist. God wrote compassion for people with disabilities into the charter of Israel. For example, “You shall not curse a deaf man, nor place a stumbling block for the blind, but you shall revere your God; I am the LORD” (Lev. 19:14). Notice that obeying this command is an expression of fearing God. One law places a curse upon the one who mistreats a person with a disability: “Cursed is he who misleads a blind person on the road. And all the people shall say, ‘Amen’” (Deut. 27:18). The mistreatment of a person with a disability was deserving of severe punishment. That is because God loves and cares for people with disabilities.

3. Job and David Follow the Law by Caring for People with Disability.¹²

Scripture presents Job and David as righteous for their faithfulness. In declaring his innocence before his accusers, Job explained to them that he had kept God's law, which required compassionate treatment toward people with disabilities. The suffering Job said, “I was eyes to the blind, and feet to the lame” (Job 29:15). This meant that he had helped those who were sight-impaired and unable to walk without difficulty due to their disabilities. In so doing Job compassionately participated in God's plan for persons with disabilities, as did others like him.

Similarly, King David assisted Mephibosheth, a young man who was unable to walk because he was dropped as a baby (2 Sam. 4:4). His father was Jonathan, a friend to whom David had pledged his faithfulness. David kept his commitment by showing compassion and caring for this young man: “So Mephibosheth lived in Jerusalem, for he ate at the king's table regularly.

Now he was lame in both feet” (2 Sam. 9:13). Notice that David not only offered basic care to Mephibosheth, but he brought him to his table as one would a family member. This was more than kindness.¹³

God's Prophets Promise Future Hope for Disability (Isaiah-Malachi)

1. God Will Establish the Persons with Disabilities Whom He Has Afflicted.

When we look at many passages that deal with future things, we find once again that people with disabilities became recipients of God's healing—in part because He demonstrates His greatness through healing them. “In that day, declares the Lord, I will assemble the lame, and gather the outcasts, even those whom I have afflicted” (Mic. 4:6). This passage reminds us that God assumes responsibility for disability. It also assures us that He will heal them. Other passages show us God's hand of kindness in restoring persons with disabilities: “The LORD opens the eyes of the blind . . .” (Ps. 146:8).

Some passages look forward to a great and future day when God will right all wrongs and reverse the effects of the curse (Rev. 22: 3). This grand event is described in terms of God restoring sight and hearing: “And on that day the deaf shall hear words of a book. And out of their gloom and darkness the eyes of the blind shall see” (Isa. 29:18).¹⁴ Again, “Behold I am bringing them from the north country, and I will gather them from the remote parts of the earth, among them the blind and the lame” (Jer. 31:8). In beautiful poetic language befitting the occasion of final healing, “Then the lame will leap like a deer, and the tongue of the dumb will shout for joy, for waters will break forth in the wilderness and streams in the Arabah” (Isa. 35:6). And finally, “I will make the lame a remnant, and the outcasts a strong nation, and the LORD will reign over them in Mount Zion from now on and forever” (Mic. 4:7). God's future plans for persons with disabilities offer healing and comfort now.

2. God Will One Day Deliver Persons with Disabilities from Oppressors.

God seeks retribution for violations of the laws against abusing people with disabilities discussed above. God promises to rescue people who are disabled from those who take advantage of them. “Behold, I am going to deal at that time with all your oppressors, I will save the lame and gather the outcast, and I will turn their shame into praise and renown in all the earth”

(Zeph. 3:19). The shame spoken of is not only due to sinning against God, but also to inexcusable social rejection and mistreatment of people with disabilities. For all those who have abused God's children with disabilities, God warns of justice and punishment.

Jesus Offers Hope and a Way for Disability (Matthew-Revelation)

When Jesus came to earth, in addition to dying on the cross for sin, part of His mission was to repair the effects of the curse, fulfilling what the law commanded, the wisdom books prescribed, and the prophets predicted for persons with disabilities. As His commissioned agents, we continue the work He began. But we are surprised to discover that part of God's plan was not only for people with disabilities to glorify Jesus, but also to minister to others—not just *in* their disabilities, but also *because of* them. How do people with disabilities minister to others? The simple answer is that those with disabilities minister to or serve others in many ways, but first in their need. Seems ironic doesn't it? Their needs provide opportunities for certain individuals or groups to serve God by caring for them. How does this work?

1. People with Disabilities Allow Jesus to Show Compassion, Bring Glory to God, and Demonstrate that He Is God's Son, the Messiah.

- A. *Jesus Had Compassion on People with Disabilities.* “And moved with compassion, Jesus touched their eyes; and immediately they regained their sight and followed Him” (Matt. 20:34). And again, “And moved with compassion, He stretched out His hand and touched him, and said to him, ‘I am willing, be cleansed’” (Mark 1:42). The Bible calls these miracles “the mighty acts of God” or “the works of God.” When questioned about the purpose of healing a blind man, Jesus responded that it was “in order that *the works of God* might be displayed in him” (John 9:1-3, emphasis added). In healing persons with disabilities, God's mighty acts are personalized and put on display for all to see as Jesus' personal compassion and fair treatment of others.
- B. *Jesus Brought Glory to God by Healing Persons with Disabilities.* In response to Jesus exercising compassion by healing the people with disabilities, the multitude praised God. They glorified God because Jesus showed compassion to persons with disabilities

as part of the Father's will. "Large crowds came to him. They brought blind people and those who could not walk. They also brought disabled people, those who could not speak and many others. They laid them at his feet, and he healed them. The people were amazed. . . . So the people praised the God of Israel" (Mat. 15:30-31: *NIRV*).¹⁵ When Jesus healed people with disabilities, it brought glory to God.

- C. *Jesus Demonstrated that He is the Messiah by Healing People with Disabilities.* One day when John the Baptist sent messengers to ask Jesus if He was the Messiah, Jesus pointed immediately to His miracles on behalf of those who needed help as proof: "Go back and report to John what you have seen and heard: The blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cured, the dead are raised, and the good news is preached to the poor" (Luke 7:22). The fact that disabilities are included with fatal diseases and harmful poverty demonstrates that Jesus, as the Son of God, desires to restore those affected by disabilities along with all other devastating effects of the curse. The end result is "creation-quality" conditions. We do well to remember with Tim Keller that "Jesus' miracles were not so much violations of the natural order, but a restoration of the natural order. God did not create a world with blindness . . ." (Keller, 2008a, p.112).¹⁶

2. People with Disabilities Give Jesus the Opportunity to Correct Wrong Ideas about God's Love, Human Sinfulness, Suffering, and Faith.

Wrong ideas about disability include the following:

Myth: God Does Not Love People with Disabilities. This notion is a carryover from pagan beliefs. But the Bible makes it clear that a disability is not God's disapproval or punishment upon individuals who are disabled. He allows disabilities for His intended purposes: to bring glory to Himself, spiritual growth in people with disabilities, and ministry opportunities and blessings for believers who serve people with disabilities.¹⁷

Myth: People with Disabilities or Their Parents Sinned against God. A second wrong idea about the cause of disabilities is seen when someone asked Jesus whether it was the man born blind or his parents who had sinned. Jesus responded "neither" and explained that

this man's blindness existed "in order that the works of God might be displayed in him" (John 9:1-3). Jesus' point is clear: the disability existed so that he might heal this man. While this is a specific instance, a general principle lies behind it. God allows some people and not others to be disabled in order to accomplish His purposes.¹⁸

Myth: People with Disabilities Lack the Faith to Be Healed. Some people believe that if a person has enough faith, they will be healed. This is nowhere taught in the Bible, but is based on a misunderstanding of Matthew 17:20 and 1 Corinthians 13:2 where nothing is impossible with faith. The clear teaching of the Bible is that we must pray as those who submit our wills to God—if it is God's will, he certainly can heal a person's disability. That happened during Jesus' earthly ministry and on a few other occasions in the Old Testament and the early church. Most would agree it could happen today. But it has always been done for the glory of God, and often for the growth of the individual. Many people with disabilities have great faith and live victorious Christian lives. In fact, their faith may be stronger than the average able-bodied or able-minded believer *because of the disability.*

3. People with Disabilities Allow Believers the Opportunity to Demonstrate Love for God, Love for People, and Faithfulness.

By prioritizing spiritual needs but not neglecting physical and cognitive needs, Jesus exemplifies our role with persons with disabilities. What is more, the deacons in the early church serve as models for the role of all believers in assisting others.¹⁹ With great confidence that God can use us, and these godly examples, we should consider our mission and our motives.

A. *Our Mission: How Can We Serve Persons with Disabilities?* We began this study by saying that God's story in Scripture is about His mission on earth. Our mission, which must be consistent with His, should begin with evangelizing and discipling people with disabilities (Matt. 28:18-20). This two-stage process should always be our first priority. People with disabilities need to be in Jesus' church learning and growing. Compassionate treatment and mercy ministry should be woven into the fabric of every thought and deed pertaining to disability, not treated as an

additional component of disability ministry, or (even worse), pitted against evangelism and discipleship. For example, well-intentioned Christians can become so consumed with a person's disabling condition that they neglect their spiritual condition. One's spiritual condition must always be our greatest concern—although not necessarily our first in treatment—because it is anyone's greatest need. We evangelize and disciple people with disabilities because that is how we best love anyone. Once we have prioritized spiritual matters, we also must address what might prevent someone with a disability from participating in the Christian life. How can we possibly help the person with a disability respond to God's Word when the disability prevents that person from responding?

- *Evangelize People with Disabilities.* First, we must consider how to lead people with disabilities to Christ. We must not appear to place conditions on our love for persons with disabilities. This is all too easy to do. For example, we must not lead an unbelieving person with a disability to think that we will not care about them unless they become a Christian. This is manipulation and it is wrong. What is more, reaching some disability groups with the Gospel will require additional commitment and care.
- *Disciple or Train People with Disabilities.* Next, it is critical that we help the person with a disability to grow spiritually in the best way possible. We must not cause the person with a disability who claims to be a Christian to think that unless they grow spiritually in conduct, we will treat them like a child by punishing them or ignoring them.
- *Ensure that People with Disabilities Worship, Fellowship, and Serve in the Local Church.* Finally, we must provide opportunities for people with disabilities to participate in all aspects of church life. We will fellowship with them and participate in practicing the "one anothers" with them.²⁰ They must also be enabled to engage fully in worship. What is more, they must exercise the spiritual gifts each one has (1 Pet. 4:10) to serve in our churches. In short, we must see to it that every aspect of the local church experience is realized in their lives. In Jesus' words, we must invite them to our banquet, after

which we can expect Jesus' promised outcome: we (all) will be blessed (Luke 14:13).

B. *Our Motives: Why Should We Serve People with Disabilities?* All of the above precautions deal with the needs of a person with a disability. But just as crucial are the motives of the person (regardless of whether they themselves have a disability) whom God calls upon to minister to those with disabilities. The Bible gives many reasons for serving God that address the motives of His people. Believers should serve God out of both fear and love for God. There is no contradiction. Motives are complex. This is even more true of the believers' motives for caring for persons with disabilities. It might help if we understood some of the many reasons, both direct and indirect, which God gives us for caring for persons with disabilities. Hopefully then we can serve people who have a disability with purer motives. The following motive list is ranked from the weakest to the strongest.

- *Because We All Will Be Disabled Some Day.* In Ecclesiastes 12:1-3, Solomon talks about the "difficult days," referring to the increasing difficulties as we approach the end our life. Statistics remind us that at some point in our lives more than 70% of us will not be able to climb a flight of stairs. Most of us will become visually or hearing-impaired, needing glasses or hearing aids if we do not lose the ability to see or hear completely. When this occurs, *we will be disabled.*²¹
- *Because We Must Help the Weak.* The Apostle John says, "And this is His commandment, that we believe in the name of His Son Jesus Christ, and love one another, just as He commanded us" (1 John 3:23). The Apostle Paul called this "faith working through love" (Gal. 5:6), that is, our faith will work itself out in our love toward other people. In fact, Paul says, "In everything I showed you that by working hard in this manner you must help the weak and remember the words of the Lord Jesus, that He Himself said, 'It is more blessed to give than to receive'" (Acts 20:35). We come to understand the word "weak" as it is used in other contexts to include people with disabilities, for example, "And a great multitude was following Him, because they were seeing the signs which He

was performing on those who were sick” (John 6:2). But we must be cautious in defining what may actually “help” any individual.²²

- *Because Our Eternal Rewards Will Be Based on Serving Selflessly.* One day, Jesus instructed a group of Pharisees and a dinner host about humility by teaching on disability. “When you give a luncheon or a dinner, do not invite your friends or your brothers or your relatives or rich neighbors, lest they also invite you in return, and repayment come to you. But when you give a reception, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind. And you will be blessed, since they do not have the means to repay you; for you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous” (Luke 14:12-14). Jesus strikes at the heart when He says that this is the best kind of service because you cannot expect anything from people with disabilities; you can only give. God keeps a record of our good and bad deeds. Solomon summarized, “The end of the matter is this; fear God and keep His commandments, for all must give an account of every deed” (Eccles. 12:13-14). The Bible calls believers to humble themselves to serve God for heavenly rewards.
- *Because God Has Empowered Us to Love Well.* We thank God for whatever measure of healthy bodies and minds He has given to us. Out of our thankfulness we consider how we might help people whose bodies and minds do not work well or at all. The world of a person who has a disability is often physically difficult and emotionally painful. For those with mental disabilities the situation is sometimes more difficult. People who are mentally and physically challenged need loving acceptance and perhaps a little help, just like anyone else. Once again, consider what others in Scripture did for those with disabilities: for example, they led the blind; they carried beds for those who couldn't walk; and they even lowered people with disabilities into pools, brought them to gatherings of the church, and so forth. Most importantly, they helped them get to where Jesus and His apostles were so that they could learn about Jesus, and in some cases, be healed. Perhaps more critically than we might imagine, people with disabilities need to belong.²³

- *Because Believers with Disabilities Are Part of the Body of Christ.* One of the most worthy reasons for serving people with disabilities is that it is the right thing to do. Whatever responsibilities and privileges fall to all believers in the body of Christ, they also are due to those with disabilities. What is more, we should not be shocked if they do certain things better than more able-bodied and able-minded believers.
- *Because Believers with Disabilities Serve Uniquely.* Perhaps most importantly, people with disabilities can minister in incredible ways. In fact, they can minister as effectively, if not more so, than their sisters and brothers in Christ who do not have disabilities.²⁴ Their physical or mental disability, in God's hands, becomes a ministry blessing.²⁵ This brings new insight to Paul's challenge that all believers in the body of Christ have gifts that the Church needs (1 Pet. 4:10). He was not excluding people with disabilities.

Consider Tyson Snedeker, who has a very rare condition: a degenerative neuromuscular disorder of unknown origin or family history. Tyson was born a normal happy child with no developmental problems. At the age of 2 years Tyson and his twin brother began showing signs of problems with balance, breathing, hearing and vision. This condition is degenerative, leaving Tyson at this time with profound deafness, legally blind, unable to swallow, and unable to breathe without a ventilator. Tyson has generalized muscle weakness which requires him to use a power wheelchair to move about independently. With all of these challenges before him, Tyson is preparing for ministry. He studies God's word through online biblical training and regular church attendance. He ministers to those with whom he comes into contact, through the aid of his nurses and sign language interpreters. Through testimony, prayer, and encouragement from God's word, Tyson serves the Lord by reaching out to others. In fact, Tyson's insights, which he draws from his biblical knowledge and the experience of his disability, richly inspire those who know him. This side of heaven, Tyson knows his condition will most likely worsen—but he eagerly awaits a time when he can dance with joy and sing the praises of a great God, with his body anew. Perhaps God may use Tyson's testimony in your life!

It would take another, much longer article to treat all the implications of this matter. But it can be summed up with the realization that we are blessed to have disabilities in our individual and collective Christian experience.

The Bible, by treating people with disabilities as part of the assembly in the Old Testament and the Church in the New Testament, shows us clearly that people with disabilities are just that. They are *people* who happen, by God's sovereign plan, to have disabilities. They are not another category of person, but have varying capacities, gifts, and talents, just like those who do not have disabilities. If we are obedient to biblical teaching on disabilities, we will treat all people as one of us, and give a little assistance where it is needed. But we would be remiss if we did not conclude by recapturing the spirit of the prophets who saw disability as ultimately glorifying God. Our greatest blessings in service will come through being a blessing to others with disabilities and being served by them. God's story began in disability-free paradise with a tree; that is where it ends and reopens for a new and endless disability-free eternity. Jesus entered our sin-cursed world and brought healing through His death. No wonder John says in the final chapter of our Bibles, "And the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations. And there was no longer any curse" (Rev. 22:3), or a disability.

Not every story finds a happy ending. But for those who love people with disabilities and those loved by them, the ending could hardly be better—perfect bodies, perfect minds, and perfect fellowship with the God whose story includes disability.

Notes

1. This study was first presented to the congregation of Grace Bible Church of Brandon, FL, who love and appreciate people with disabilities and their families. A small portion was the basis for a paper "How Disabled is the Body of Christ?" presented to the Evangelical Theological Society at its annual meeting, Washington, D.C., 1993. An edited version appears in (Eareckson Tada & Bundy, 2012).
2. Recent scholarly work in biblical studies that focuses on detailed aspects of disability include: (Olyan, 2008); (Raphael, 2008); (Avalos, Melcher, & Schipper, 2007). Studies in traditional Jewish literature include (Holden, 1991); (Katz, 1925); and (Dorman, 2007).
3. Disability terms are low frequency and vary with the translation: Blind (*KJV* 82, *ASV* 79); Deaf (*KJV* 15, *ASV* 16); Dumb [= mute] (*KJV* 29, *ASV* 31); and lame (*KJV* 66, *ASV* 70).
4. This study follows the contours of the disability theme, and begs a more detailed study of Genesis – Revelation and the theme's development. What is more, the goal herein is to listen afresh to the disability theme as it moves through the Old and New Testaments of Scripture while acknowledging that disability may be viewed from the perspective of other models. It is not the deliberate intention of this writer to serve the medical or defectological models called into question by those from social, cultural, and other logical constructs. See (Moss & Schipper, 2011, pp.2-4).

5. It is significant that the Hebrew words used in this passage that translate “mute”, “deaf”, and “blind” are specially marked with a grammatical pattern indicating physical disabilities. See (Seow, 1995, p.21).
6. This verse teaches us that God Himself and the people of Israel were sensitive to the distinction between people with and without disabilities, but they did not overdo the distinction.
7. Historical studies include (Hoffner, 2003).
8. One of Israel's earliest statements of faith said that God is “compassionate and gracious” (Exod. 34:6).
9. Sometimes the biblical writer has in mind more of a spiritual than a physical or developmental issue. In many contexts it helps us to understand spiritual perception. It is common for biblical interpreters to look for such analogies in their interpretation of texts treating disabilities. For example, “Although we do not want in any way to denigrate the physical hardship of the man who is brought to Jesus for healing, the story of his ears being opened and his tongue being loosed inspires us to consider the ways in which we may be spiritually deaf to God and the world around us. If not only physical but spiritual disabilities are suggested by the deaf mute's condition, then we may consider what we are willing or unwilling, able or unable, to hear from God, our neighbors and the larger world of which we are a part.” (Wilhelm, 2008, p.133). Helpful as this approach may be, it can easily miss the crucial instruction in a passage about the disability itself.
10. In passages where people with disabilities are considered unclean (see below), this has more to do with disease associated with the disability than the disability itself. It does not indicate that God or people should avoid or reject people with disabilities.
11. Interestingly, although the Bible lacks an equivalent term for our English “disability,” it presents a perspective on disability that is consistent and pervasive. While it is true that the disabled were sometimes treated as ritually unclean (Lev. 21:18; 22:22), it seems clear enough that this had to do with the transmission of disease or the perception of unblemished perfection in didactic symbolic gestures. See (Olyan, 2008). These small and potentially confusing aspects of disability pale in significance and scope when compared to the Lord's heart for people with disabilities seen throughout Scriptures.
12. The book of Job is part of the wisdom collection (e.g., Job, Ecclesiastes, Proverbs, selected Psalms, and Song of Solomon). We know David primarily through the historical writings, which include narrative portions of Scripture sometimes referred to as stories. But both wisdom and narrative are rooted in the Law in that they reflect critically upon it.
13. For a detailed treatment of this important passage, see (Schipper, 2006).
14. We must be cautious in using Isaiah's and other writers' language, since they sometimes refers analogically to spiritual disabilities (e.g., spiritual blindness, etc.).
15. *The New International Reader's Version* has sensitively rendered the language of disability in this passage.
16. In his New York Times bestseller *The Reason for God*, Keller argues that disability is one of God's ways of maturing people spiritually (Keller, 2008b, p.25).
17. More often than not, searching for unstated reasons is unproductively difficult.
18. The point of confusion is worth considering. Some people become sick for coming before God presumptuously at the Lord's table; others have even died (1 Cor. 11:30). But this is no reason for prejudging a disabled person or their parents by arguing that someone must have sinned in order for God to allow the disability. We must never forget that God severely rebuked Job's comforters for accusing Job of having sinned simply because he was suffering (Job 42:7-9).
19. In Acts 6:1-6, the early church selects seven individuals to ensure that all widows receive the care that they need. It is estimated that a widow was usually about 60 years old, and that the disabling effects of age were making it impossible for them to care for themselves. The deacons were responsible to see that the widows were cared for, though they did not perform all such ministry themselves. May God give us courageous and compassionate deacons in our churches who will make certain that the needs of the widows and persons with disabilities are met.
20. A full list includes: *Encourage* one another's faith (Rom. 1:12); *Be devoted* to one another in brotherly love (Rom. 12:10); *Give preference* to one another in love (Rom. 12:10); *Be of the same mind* toward one another (Rom. 12:16); *Building up* of one another (Rom. 14:19); God . . . *grant you the same mind* as one another (Rom. 15:5); *Accept* one another (Rom. 15:7); *Admonish* one another (Rom. 15:14); *Greet* one another with a holy kiss (Rom. 16:16); *Wait for* one another (1 Cor. 11:33); Have the same *care for* one another (1 Cor. 12:25); Through love *serve* one another (Gal. 5:13); *Bear* one another's *burdens*

- (Gal. 6:2); *Showing forbearance* to one another in love (Eph. 4:2); *Be kind* to one another, tenderhearted (Eph. 4:32); *Forgive* one another (Eph. 4:37); *Be subject* to one another, *forgiving* one another (Eph. 5:21); *Bearing with* one another, and *forgiving* one another (Col. 3:13); *Admonish* one another in psalms, hymns and spiritual songs (Col. 3:16); *Abound in love* for one another (1 Thess. 3:12); *Love* one another (Rom. 13:8); *Comfort* one another with these words (1 Thess. 4:18); *Encourage* one another, and *build up* one another (1 Thess. 5:11); *Seek that which is good* for one another and for all men (1 Thess. 5:15); *Encourage* one another day after day (Heb. 3:13: 10:25); *Stimulate* one another *to love and good deeds* (Heb. 10:24); *Confess your sins* to one another and *pray for* one another (James 5:16); *Be hospitable toward* one another without complaint (1 Pet. 4:9); Employ it (your spiritual gift) in *servicing* one another (1 Pet. 4:10); *Clothe yourselves with humility toward* one another (1 Pet. 5:5). Negative “one anothers” include do not *judge* one another (Rom. 14:13); Do not *bite and devour* one another (Gal. 5:15); Do not *be in opposition* to one another (Gal. 5:17); Do not *boast, challenging* one another, *envying* one another (Gal. 5:26); Do not *lie* to one another (Col. 3:9); Do not *hate* one another (Titus 3:3); Do not *speak against* one another (James 4:11); and Do not *complain against* one another (James 5:9).
21. The 2000 U.S. Census found that 19.4 percent of the population is affected by physical or intellectual disability. For a challenge to rethink how we define, categorize, and view disability from a Christian perspective, see (Creamer, 2009). This study offers a critical reminder that disability as God sees it and uses it cannot be reduced to facile understandings of human suffering (though we must also explore the connection with suffering). It also calls for a reevaluation of the notion of normal and the boundaries of human limitation. Because there are no perfect human bodies or minds, we must recalibrate our conceptualizations and our terminology. In no uncertain terms, this work redefines what it means to be ‘normally’ human.
 22. Those who would lovingly help those with disabilities must consider how love is best applied. To love is not to develop a dependency, which robs an individual of dignity. See (Schwartz, 2007, p.xvii).
 23. Listen to the story told by Joni Eareckson Tada about how her church ministered to her after she became completely paralyzed as a result of a diving accident: “What I discovered that Sunday morning, after my family lifted me out of the car and into my wheelchair, changed my entire outlook on church. Someone had hammered together a few pieces of plywood to make a ramp. People smiled and asked me how I was doing at college. Old friends asked me to sit with them and held my Bible and hymnal. The feeling was warm and friendly. I felt welcomed. I belonged.” (Newman & Tada, 1993, p.9).
 24. See (Hsu, 2008).
 25. Suffering realigns our perspectives: “We must learn to regard people less in the light of what they do or omit to do, and more in the light of what they suffer.” (Bonhoeffer, 1971, p.10).

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