



Church and Disability

Living together as God's people



Table of contents

Foreword	4
1. Introduction	7
2. Disability and inclusion scan	10
3. Case studies	34
4. Games	40
5. Sermon outlines	49
6. Bible studies	62
7. Sundayschool lessons	83

This tool was developed by Rev. Jan Ouwehand and Huib Cornielje. We hope it will lead to further reflection on the issue and will be used fruitfully for the benefit of the Christian community.

The development and publication were made possible by the GZB, a missionary organization in the Netherlands. When you use the toolkit in training or other meetings, we encourage you to mention the GZB as the organization responsible for the toolkit. Any comments or questions can be submitted to us as authors via the GZB website (www.gzb.nl).

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Foreword

This toolkit is a result of internal discussion within the Gereformeerde Zendings Bond (GZB) to increasingly pay attention in its missionary work to vulnerable groups in society and church. If such vulnerable groups and their special needs are not specifically mentioned and getting attention in our work, there is a great risk that we never include them in building the church, which in our view is a serious shortcoming and omission. See also 1 Corinthians 12:12-27 (NIV).

12 There is one body, but it has many parts. But all its many parts make up one body. It is the same with Christ. 13 We were all baptized by one Holy Spirit. And so we are formed into one body. It didn't matter whether we were Jews or Gentiles, slaves or free people. We were all given the same Spirit to drink. 14 So the body is not made up of just one part. It has many parts. 15 Suppose the foot says, "I am not a hand. So I don't belong to the body." By saying this, it cannot stop being part of the body. 16 And suppose the ear says, "I am not an eye. So I don't belong to the body." By saying this, it cannot stop being part of the body. 17 If the whole body were an eye, how could it hear? If the whole body were an ear, how could it smell? 18 God has placed each part in the body just as he wanted it to be. 19 If all the parts were the same, how could there be a body? 20 As it is, there are many parts. But there is only one body. 21 The eye can't say to the hand, "I don't need you!" The head can't say to the feet, "I don't need you!" 22 In fact, it is just the opposite. The parts of the body that seem to be weaker are the ones we can't do without. 23 The parts that we think are less important we treat with special honor. The private parts aren't shown. But they are treated with special care. 24 The parts that can be shown don't need special care. But God has put together all the parts of the body. And he has given more honor to the parts that didn't have any. 25 In that way, the parts of the body will not take sides. All of them will take care of one another. 26 If one part suffers, every part suffers with it. If one part is honored, every part shares in its joy. 27 You are the body of Christ. Each one of you is a part of it.

It is with a lot of enthusiasm that we developed this toolkit about Christianity, the Church and Disability. This is a toolkit and not a training in itself. It is up to you to compile with the available materials a training or a workshop. The material is rich and will enable you to develop a training for 5 days. However, it is very well possible that you have only half a day available for training. In that case you should select relevant materials from this toolkit.

This toolkit has been developed for training in disability inclusion in Nepal and India: two countries with similarities but also 2 countries with vast differences. When you intend to use this toolkit in another country for instance in Europe or an African country, we strongly advise you to contextualise different parts of the toolkit e.g. the case studies which refer to Nepalese or Indian situations.

We strongly advise you to involve people with disabilities in your training, preferably as trainers as well as participants. Their experiences of discrimination, stigmatization and facing various barriers in life – even in church life – are powerful testimonies which will help you as trainer and participants to continuously reflect on the realities of life of being disabled in church and society.

There is always a tendency to focus in such training on people with disabilities who became or are role models. We however realize that the vast majority of people with disabilities don't see

themselves as role model and many of them are just struggling with the hardships of daily life. They may be vulnerable, weak and not successful. They may be isolated, excluded and stigmatized. We promote in this training an approach, a disability model, that goes beyond the well-known disability models i.e. a Christian approach towards disability whereby we have specific attention and compassion for those who are not so strong and successful. Such an approach takes the following elements into consideration:

- God takes unfair treatment of the underprivileged very seriously!
- Approach people with disabilities with humility.
- Serve people with disabilities exactly as if we were serving God.
- Allow people with disabilities to use their gifts to serve us.
- Treat people with disabilities with more, not less, respect and honour
- Fight for the rights of people with disabilities.
- We need to go beyond inclusion and become friends.
- Touch them, hug them, and love them as He did.
- Go where people with disabilities are and be with them and show them God's love and care.

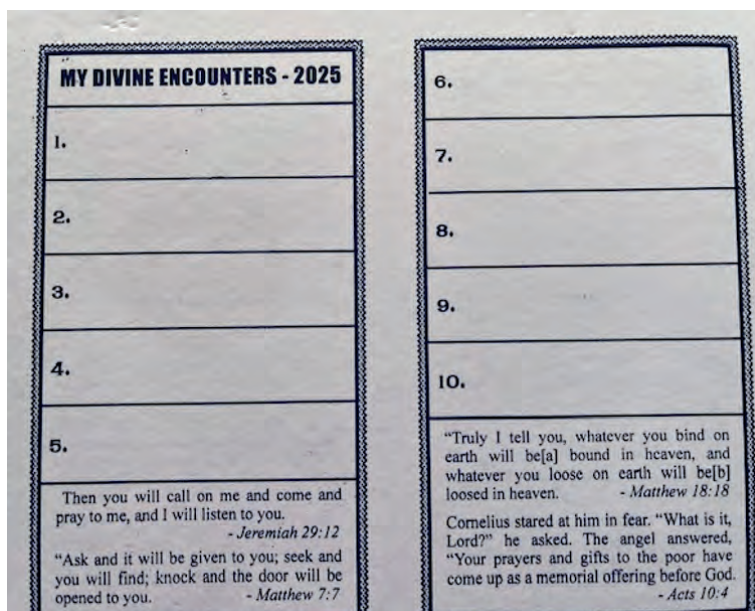
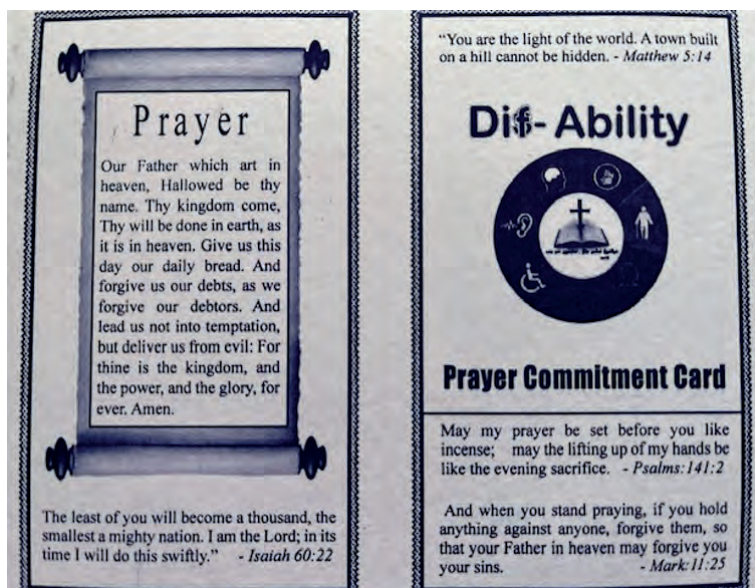


The toolkit consists of the following parts:

1. Basics about Disability including background information but also a community and congregation disability survey and a disability inclusion scan for churches
2. Five case studies with question that help you in understanding the life of a person with disability
3. Three interactive training forms i.e. games
4. Five sermon outlines
5. Five Bible studies
6. Five Sundayschool stories
7. A section about useful resources

We urge you to use this material in your trainings/workshop and where needed and possible contextualize them to your own particular situation. Feel of course free to develop own materials and we would be very happy to get a copy of that material.

A very interesting addition was made by Paulus Samuel from South India i.e. a prayer calendar for one year which helps pastors to pay specific attention to the commitment to make their churches disability inclusive (see the example below).





Introduction

Try to speak with people with a disability and get them on board in all decision making, organization of meetings etc. We have to do things together and give a voice to those who know!

All people are different. Sometimes those differences are seen as someone who is 'having a disability'. In every culture people have ideas that may be discriminating or stigmatizing people who are different or having a disability. As Christians we believe all people are created by God and we are called to love people however different they may be. All are welcome in the church and by living together we will grow in our understanding of God and the deep meaning of grace (Ephesians 3: 28). This toolkit is developed to help congregations and individuals to connect with people with disabilities. In the toolkit you will find material that can be used by your local church to help you becoming more inclusive to people with disabilities. This overview gives some help in the use of the material in the toolkit.

A. Getting started

It is important to discuss as leaders of the church what we want to achieve! It starts by asking ourselves why we want to connect with people who are neglected by others. This should be shared with the congregation.

One of the 5 Bible studies about disability in the Bible will help you to find out how God is treating people with disabilities. These Bible studies help to reflect on your own ideas, attitudes, behavior about people with disabilities.

It is good to discover how we feel about people with (severe) disabilities by using the Disability Inclusion Scan.

The Game of Life will give you insight into the (lack of) opportunities which people with disabilities may have in society and church. It also shows you that in many societies and cultures men have better/more opportunities than women.

Tools: Bible Study for a meeting in the Congregation
Disability Inclusion Scan for the Congregation
Game of Life

The goal of this program is to help each other to grow in our faith and better understand each other's ideas, thoughts and practices towards people with disabilities. We hope that you want to become a congregation which is honoring and praising God by being a loving community. Loving means that everyone feels welcome (belonging) and will be able to grow as a disciple of Christ.

B. Preaching and Teaching

In church services sermons can cover important aspects of biblical teaching. This covers issues like:

- What is the biblical understanding of men? What do we mean when we say men is created in the image of God and why is that relevant?
- How does the Bible speak about healing?
- What is the relation between sin and disability?
- How does the Bible speak about exclusion?
- Why are we all needed in the community of God?

Background information on disability and the way the Bible looks at (people with) disability as well as the sermon outlines helps the pastor to prepare himself in teaching the congregation about the Biblical and thus Christian way of accepting and respecting people with disabilities.

Tools: Background information on Bible and Disability
Sermon Outlines

Churches are different in the way they organize training of their members. Maybe there are youth groups, Bible study groups and women groups in church. During the week in which a certain subject is preached, Bible study material is available to discuss the same issue in those small groups.

It is important to discuss together also the different disabilities that we see in our church. Case studies will help us to get a clear picture of the impact of a disability on the life of individual and families and possible needs for support. Every case study has a series of questions that will help you to analyze the case study and learn lessons for yourself as well as your church. Those case studies can be used in different settings!

Tools: Bible Study Material
Case Studies about People with Disabilities

If there are Sundayschool classes material is available as well:

Tools: Sundayschool Material (stories and material)
Games for Children

There are different options for using the material in church. You can choose for an intensive period of preaching and teaching. You take a six-week period to cover all the different aspects. Another option is to take a whole season and pay attention to disability one Sunday per month.

C. Working on Belonging for Everyone

Apart from preaching and teaching it is important to do things or take actions in and with the congregation. What are the things you can do inside the congregation? What is needed and what is possible?

Tool: Needs and Possibilities – a scan for the congregation

If needed and possible, you can start activities for people with disabilities in the community. Be however careful because you are not a service organization. In the situations that require professional support do refer people to those professionals or organizations (public and private ones)

Tools: Serving the Community
List of organizations within your community where you can ask for advice or refer people to for (professionals) support. We strongly advise to make yourself such a list as this list will differ from community to community.

D. Evaluation/Follow-up

When you work with this toolkit it is important to evaluate the effects/results! Use the scan for the congregation again after six months or one year and discuss the changes with the congregation and with people living with disabilities

Tool: Scan for the Congregation

When you wanted to get involved in specific activities in the congregation and/or in the community, evaluate those activities together with people with disabilities. Where the ideas implemented and what was the impact on the lives of the people?



Disability and inclusion scan

Basics about disability

The understanding of disability has changed quite a bit over the past decades, not only in society as a whole but also in terms of international development initiatives. Persons with disabilities have played, and continue to play, a major role in the changes that have taken place.

What is disability?

The international Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health (ICF) (WHO, 2001), the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) (UN, 2006) and the different Acts of Nepal and India define and/or explain disability in various ways.

According to the World Health Organisation and the United Nations (UN), disability is the outcome of an interaction between health conditions and impairments and the physical, human-built, attitudinal, and social environment.

The UNCRPD does not define disability and includes, among persons with disability, those who have long-term physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairments which, in interaction with various barriers, may hinder their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others. The United Nations Human Rights Council Resolution 7/9, “Human Rights of Persons with Disabilities” (2008), holds that “...disability results from the interaction between persons with impairments and attitudinal and environmental barriers that hinder their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others.” The UNCRPD attempts to explain disability by outlining some of the long-term impairments that some people may have, which, in interaction with various barriers, may pose a hindrance to their full and effective participation, resulting in a disability. The distinguishing feature in the UNCRPD explanation of disability is the use of the phrase ‘long term’ to describe the nature of the impairment. Unlike the ICF Classification, the UNCRPD does not recognise ‘interactions with health condition’ as one of the necessary aspects in the definition of disability. The UNCRPD adopts a social model of disability.

Disability is diverse and could affect one or more faculties/aspects of a person's life, such as:

- Vision
- Movement
- Mental capability: thinking, remembering, learning
- Communicating, speech
- Hearing
- Mental health
- Skin
- Social relationships

The Act Relating to Rights of Persons with Disabilities, 2074 (2017), in Nepal and the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016, in India, follow the UNCRPD explanation of disability. The principle of both Acts reflects a paradigm shift in thinking about disability from a social welfare concern to a human rights issue.

The International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health (ICF) is the World Health Organisation's (WHO's) framework for health and disability. It is the conceptual basis for the definition, measurement and policy formulations for health and disability. The ICF was introduced by the WHO to replace the 1980 International Classification of Impairments, Disabilities and Handicaps (ICIDH). The term ‘handicap’ was seen by the global disability movement as discriminatory.

Another reason for the change was that the ICIDH did not take into account the role played by the social environment in disabling people.

The ICF classifies the situation of each person within the range of health and health-related areas, as well as within the context of environmental and personal factors. The ICF looks at how an individual functions in three areas, namely:

- body functions and structures
- activities (which are tasks or actions carried out by an individual)
- participation (which is the involvement of the individual in society, or in daily living).

Activities and participation describe what a person with a health disorder does do or can do. This does not depend on the individual alone but also on the social, physical and attitudinal environment in which the individual lives.

As a result of a health disorder, changes may occur in the body functions and structures, or in activities and participation. The following terms are used to describe any changes that may occur:

Impairments are problems in body function or structure such as a change or a loss.

Activity limitations are difficulties an individual may have in carrying out activities.

Participation restrictions are problems an individual may experience in participating in family or society.

Two other terms are used in the ICF to describe the state of health and wellbeing, namely **functioning** and **disability**.

Functioning is an umbrella term encompassing all body functions and structures, activities and participation.

Disability is an umbrella term for impairments, activity limitations or participation restrictions.

The ICF promotes the view that disability is part of the diversity of the human race and identifies the components of health – functioning, activity, and participation – and their status – whether impaired, limited or restricted.

Types of Disabilities in Nepal and India

The most recent official information regarding types of disabilities in Nepal and India are as follows:

Nepal

The Nepal Census 2078 (2021) found that 2.2% of the Nepali population have some form of disability – 2.5% among the male population and 2.0% among the female population.

India

The recent estimate of the prevalence of disability in India is 4.5%. There are 21 disability categories in India.

Scale and diversity of disability

The World Health Organisation/World Bank (2011) estimates that persons with disabilities represent approximately 15% of any population. However, official estimates by Nepal and India are significantly lower than the WHO figure at approximately 2% for Nepal and 4.5% in India. Disability is under-reported in most countries, including Nepal and India, for a number of different reasons. Factors include:

- General census studies do not collect disability specific information.
- Data collectors are often inexperienced school-leavers who lack the expertise to assess and document disability-related conditions or diseases.
- Family members with disabilities may be hidden inside the home and not counted in a census.
- Information on family members with disabilities may not be presented during a census.
- People do not admit to their disability on a census form.

Most of the people with disability are over 60 years of age and are those with long-term and chronic diseases, such as cancer and heart disease. The World Report on Disability found that lower-income countries have a higher prevalence of disability, and that disability is more common among older people and among households that are poor.

Models of disability

The way that disability has been viewed has changed over time due to various perspectives, and is usually explained in the form of 'models'. One should note that these models are theoretical and that, in practice, individuals often look at disability in various ways and mix the models. The models however help to understand how people interpret and think or can think about disability. The models of disability are:

The traditional, religious or moral model

In the traditional model, disability is perceived as the result of a curse – a natural consequence of an evil that the person with a disability or one of the family members might have done. In Hinduism and Buddhism disability may be seen as bad Karma. Karma is what can be seen as predetermination or predestination. It is the good or bad emanations felt to be generated by someone or something.

In this model, persons with disabilities are treated with pity, fear and patronising attitudes. The focus is on the impairment, rather than on the needs of the person who is seen as a tragic victim. There are – unfortunately – people who still hold this view in Nepal and India.

The charity model

In the charity model, people with disability are seen as people who are weak and unlucky in life. Persons with disabilities are seen as tragic. They are pitied and treated as objects of charity and welfare, to be cared for by others, unable to help themselves or be independent. Religious institutes see people with disabilities in a similar way and often respond with various levels of help/assistance. Their needs are seen in terms of being 'special'. Thinking in such a mode(l) makes people with disabilities feel incapable, not respected and unable to participate in society and to fend for themselves.

In terms of interventions, there is a focus on providing special services, special schools, etc, because they are different from 'normal' people. Within the charity model some persons with disabilities commonly perceive themselves as powerless, useless, non-contributing individu-

als. In the context of Nepal and India, this model is still widely embraced by many, including local NGOs, some religious institutions and part of the general public. The charity model is disempowering instead of empowering. While this model receives a lot of criticism within the disability movement, we need to realise that not all people (can) have an active role in society, for instance, because of the extent of their disability. A society which cares for such people (formally via public structures or via religious ones) may ultimately be a better society.

The medical or individual model

As science and medicine developed in the age of enlightenment, disability became commonly viewed in biological or medical terms. The medical or individual model looks at disability as a deviation from the normal, caused by an underlying disease or other health condition. The medical model focuses on the impairment that requires fixing by a medical professional in order for the individual to become a 'normal' person. Thus, it is the person with disability who needs to be rehabilitated, normalised and helped to adapt to society. This model is still widely being conveyed in teaching at medical schools.

The social model

In the 1980s in particular, the global emancipation movement of persons with disabilities grew in strength and it was argued that disability is not "located" in an individual body at all but is created by the way society is organised in relation to individual differences – firstly through stigma and discrimination, and secondly through indifference to the accommodations that persons with disabilities may need to participate fully in society.

In Nepal and India, the social model gained ground in the 1990s as a number of Organisations of People with Disabilities (OPDs) were established and focused on lobbying and advocacy.

The social model considers that it is society that disables people, by designing everything to meet the needs of the majority of people who are without disability. There is recognition within the social model that there is a great deal that society can do to reduce and remove disabling barriers, and that this is the responsibility of society, rather than of the person with a disability. The social model is more inclusive in approach. Proactive thought is given to how persons with disabilities can participate in activities on an equal footing with people without disabilities. Certain adjustments are made, even where this involves time or money, to ensure that persons with disabilities are not excluded.

The rights-based model

This model is closely related to the social model and became the prevalent and desired model from the 1990s. The rights-based model takes universal human rights as a starting point. Persons with disabilities are seen to have a right to access all aspects of life within their society, on an equal basis with others. Consequently, society has the responsibility to change, to ensure that all people have equal possibilities for participation. Persons with disabilities are often denied their basic human rights, such as the right to health, education, participation in social and political processes, and to employment.

Laws and policies therefore need to ensure that these society-created barriers are removed. The two main elements of the rights-based approach are empowerment (the participation of persons with disabilities as active stakeholders) and accountability (the duty of public institutions and structures to implement these rights and to justify the quality and quantity of their implementation).

It should be noted that the above models do not manifest in a continuum – with one model succeeding or replacing another. There are elements of all models of disability in Nepal and India, notwithstanding significant progress made to embrace the social and rights-based models.

A Christian or Biblical model

Over the years we have noted a number of key principles that form the foundation of a Christian model of disability.

A Christian model of disability has something significant to contribute to the conversation about disability, one which is not optional for those who call themselves Christians, and which is also relevant to the larger culture, especially to those who are affected by disability. Below you will read some vital characteristics of a Christian or Biblical disability model.

(Based on ideas from Ros Bayes, www.bethinking.org/human-life/a-biblical-view-of-disability)

The first step is to approach people with disability with humility, in the way that the Bible instructs us to approach everyone:

“For by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think with sober judgement, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned. For as in one body we have many members, and the members do not all have the same function, so we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another. Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them”. (Romans 12:3-8)

Secondly, we should serve people with disability exactly as if we were serving God Himself:

“Whoever receives you receives me, and whoever receives me receives him who sent me... And whoever gives one of these little ones even a cup of cold water because he is a disciple, truly I say to you, he will by no means lose his reward”. (Matthew 10:40-42)

We must allow people with disability to use their gifts to serve us, the church and the community:

“Speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love”. (Ephesians 4:15-16)

We must treat people with disabilities with more, not less, respect and honour. As we have seen, they are to be given pride of place at the feast table (Luke 14:12-14) and treated with greater honour (1 Corinthians 12:23):

“Pay to all what is owed to them: taxes to whom taxes are owed, revenue to whom revenue is owed, respect to whom respect is owed, honour to whom honour is owed”. (Romans 13:7)

We must be clear that God takes unjust treatment of disadvantaged people very seriously indeed:

“I will not revoke the punishment, because they sell the righteous for silver and the needy for a pair of sandals – those who trample the head of the poor into the dust of the earth and turn aside the way of the afflicted”. (Amos 2:6-7)

"Strengthen the weak hands, and make firm the feeble knees. Say to those who have an anxious heart, 'Be strong; fear not! Behold, your God will come with vengeance, with the recompense of God. He will come and save you'". (Isaiah 35:3-4)

This may mean that at times we have to fight for the rights of people with disabilities:

"He has told you, O man, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God"? (Micah 6:8)

We must go beyond mere inclusion. People with disabilities do not simply need to be included (although that's a good starting place) – they need to belong. And in the church, of all places, there must be no 'them and us'. John Swinton explains this distinction very clearly:

"The problem we have with society is a real emphasis – and a quite right emphasis – on inclusion. I think at one level that's fine. However, inclusion is simply not enough. To include people in society is just to have them there. All we have to do is make the church accessible, have the right political structures, make sure people have a cup of tea at the end of the service or whatever. There is a big difference between inclusion and belonging".

"To belong, you have to be missed. There's something really, really important about that. People need to long for you, to want you to be there. When you're not there, they should go looking for you. When things are wrong, people should be outraged – absolutely outraged that people are doing things against people with disabilities".

We are the body of Christ, and so we should do everything that Christ's body did when He was here on earth. Where people with disabilities are concerned, we should touch, embrace and love them as He did. May we be willing to go to where people with disabilities are and be right there with them, touching them and showing God's love and care.

Basics about various types of disabilities

1. Amputation

Amputation is the removal of some part of the body. The reason for amputation is usually a disease (e.g., diabetes, malignancies, leprosy) or a trauma (e.g., accidents, anti-personnel mines).

There are two types of amputations:

1. Unilateral amputations: one (part of the) limb is removed.
2. Bilateral amputations: two limbs are (partially) removed.

People with a lower limb amputation are often able to walk again with the use of a prosthesis. This is a device that replaces the amputated part of the limb. Weaker or elderly persons or people with bilateral lower limb amputation might continue using a wheelchair. A crucial first step to achieve this rehabilitation goal is to prepare the person and the stump (residual limb) for functioning with a prosthesis.

The major differences in supporting people with a lower limb amputation are:

- Persons with bilateral amputation will be less mobile and often more dependent than those with unilateral amputation.
- Persons with above knee amputation will have more mobility difficulties than those with below knee amputation.

Note: individual differences can exist depending on the physical fitness of the person, the quality of the stump and the quality of the prosthetic fitting.

Despite the amputation, people are still able to function in daily life and perform self-care, work, take care of their family and so on with the appropriate physical and social support. When family members, community members or professionals believe they are not able, this is important to address.

The loss of a limb is per definition a traumatic experience, for the person and often for the family and friends as well. The person with an amputation often has strong feelings of loss of control and autonomy.

Each individual has unique coping strategies or reactions during the grieving process. These may well change over the course of the rehabilitation period. On the long run, most people with amputations adjust well to life.

2. Birth defects

Birth defects also known as 'congenital malformations' are physical deformities that are already existent at birth.

- Spina bifida (Diagram X) is an incomplete closing of the backbone causing paralysis or deformities to body parts. It can be surgically closed after birth, but this does not restore affected body parts.
- Hydrocephalus (Diagram X) is a problem where liquid in the brain does not drain normally to the spinal cord. Pressure on the brain and skull causes the head to swell. Without surgery the child may develop cerebral palsy (see Card 5) or become blind (see Card 3).
- Down syndrome (Diagram X) is the most common form of mental disability from birth – see Diagram 3 for typical physical characteristics.

Persons with birth defects might be at risk for abuse, and safeguarding needs to receive important attention. Girls especially are at risk since they are not always able to protect themselves. Abuse can have many shapes: neglect (caregivers not being able to provide in the persons' needs or protection from dangerous situations), physical abuse, psychological or emotional abuse and sexual abuse. Such abuse can also occur when caregivers/the family is not present, by neighbours or other community members.

Caring for a child with a birth defect can place great demands on parents. They will require ongoing support to cope with these pressures from the moment of identification and reoccurring throughout life phases.

Having to visit health clinics, hospitals and rehabilitation centres regularly prevent persons with birth defects, their parents and/or spouses from being able to work. This can result in the loss of income, especially for single parents, and a feeling of isolation. Some organisations or parent support groups have soft loan systems that make it possible for individuals with a disability and their family to create a business near the house where they can also receive care easily.

Caregivers and/or the family of persons with birth defects may experience difficulties dealing with certain activities and situations or being accepted by the rest of their family and the community. There can be stigma from the community but can also result in self-stigma. Birth defects are not a result of sin, fate or witchcraft. There is a medical cause.

3. Blindness

Partial or complete blindness can be due to a number of causes. Child blindness is often caused by poor nutrition/infection and therefore can be prevented.

- Xerophthalmia (Diagram X) for example is dryness of the outer parts of the eye with patches of little grey bubbles (Bitot's spots), that can be prevented by eating foods with Vitamin A (present in most fruits and vegetables).
- Cataract is a clouding of the inner side of the lens. It often occurs in older people.
- Trachoma (Diagram X), known for swollen eyelids, can be prevented by keeping the eyes clean and keeping flies away.

If you suspect visual problems, conduct a simple eye test (Diagram 2). Ask a person to cover one eye and read different sized text (E-shapes) from a distance of six meters. Refer persons with suspected visual problems to a specialist.

4. Burns

A burn is an injury to the skin caused by heat from hot liquids, hot objects or flames, or due to radiation, radioactivity, electricity, friction or contact with chemicals. In low- and middle-income countries, the number one cause of burns at home are scald burns. These are burns from hot liquids and they often occur during cooking, which is mainly done at floor level, using an open fire or cooking stoves. Most of the victims are very young children, who are crawling or learning to walk and are unaware of dangers in the cooking area. Also, flame burns are common, due to falling candles or paraffin lamps at night, setting flame to the mosquito net, mattress or loose-fitting clothes.

Severe burns can change the life of a person completely. Often it negatively affects one's physical functioning and body image, which causes poor self-esteem and (self-) stigma.

A burn injury is a very abrupt change which asks a lot from the person in terms of coping with a new situation. It may be that the person is suddenly (more) dependent on others in e.g.,

activities of daily living, taking care of the family and/or earning an income. Each person has their unique coping strategies: some people may be able to cope well, others may find this much more challenging. In the long run, most people with a burn injury adjust well to life.

People, especially children, often tease each other about different appearances. They may be laughing and excluding others from participation in e.g., sports and leisure activities. Teasing is often a result of not understanding the situation or why a person looks different. People who are teased may become depressed or anxious with other (new) people.

Family life can be greatly affected by a family member with burns. People with a severe burn injury often stay in a hospital for a long period of time. People with limited income may be more seriously affected when getting burns because of various reasons:

- High (medical) costs for burns treatment over a long time.
- High transportation costs to get from/to the hospital or health centre.
- Lack of income as burn victims cannot work and/or people who need to take care of their burned family member cannot do that either.
- Loss of work due to a long absence during the recovery period.

5. Cerebral Palsy

Cerebral Palsy (CP) is a permanent but non-progressive and non-contagious disability that results from damage to parts of the brain before the age of about three years. This could have been caused before, during or after birth, leading to impaired development of movement and posture.

In addition to making it difficult for some people with CP to sit, stand, and walk, CP can cause difficulties with other skills such as bladder control, saliva control, speaking, and eating. Some people may also have difficulty seeing, hearing, or learning in general. They may experience pain and seizures. Having one or more of these problems makes it harder to carry out daily activities. Each person may be affected in a different way and to a different degree. Their ability to learn may be affected by the difficulties mentioned.

Persons with Cerebral Palsy might be at risk for abuse and safeguarding needs to receive important attention. Girls especially are at risk since they are not always able to protect themselves.

Abuse can have many shapes: neglect (caregivers not being able to provide in the persons' needs or protection from dangerous situations), physical abuse, psychological or emotional abuse and sexual abuse. Such abuse can also occur when caregivers/the family is not present, by neighbours or other community members.

Caring for a child with a birth defect can place great demands on parents. They will require ongoing support to cope with these pressures.

Having to visit health clinics, hospitals and rehabilitation centres regularly prevent persons with birth defects, their parents and/or spouses from being able to work. This can result in the loss of income, especially for single parents. Some organisations or parent support groups have soft loan systems that make it possible for individuals with a disability and their family to create a business near the house where they can also receive care easily.

Caregivers and/or the family of persons with birth defects may experience difficulties dealing

with certain activities and situations or being accepted by the rest of their family and the community. There can be stigma from the community but can also result in self-stigma.

6. Clubfoot

Clubfoot is a deformity of the foot a child is born with. The symptoms of this condition are:

- The front of the foot is angled downward and inward, increasing the arch and turning the heel inward.
- The calf muscles in the affected leg are usually underdeveloped.
- The affected foot may be up to about 2.5 centimeters shorter than the other foot.

The clubfoot deformity is the most common serious congenital abnormality to affect the foot (approximately 1 in 800 births). Most often it is occurring on its own, but occasionally it is associated with other disorders affecting the muscles and nerves such as Spina Bifida or Arthrogryposis. Clubfoot is more than twice as common in boys than girls. If a child with clubfoot is diagnosed soon after birth and correctly treated by a specialist, then the child will be able to wear regular shoes and walk.

Many older people also have clubfoot. The treatment for older people is palliative – that is, it will not cure the clubfoot but helps clients to live with the condition. Palliative treatment involves the use of special (firm and supportive) shoes or a brace.

Many factors may affect the person with clubfoot and his/her family emotionally. They usually experience different stages of emotional distress, especially when the person or family does not understand the diagnose or is not referred to a hospital for treatment. This can result in feeling hopeless, depressed or sad.

Around the world, there are different beliefs about what causes a child to be born with clubfoot, such as spiritual influences, spells or curses. Sometimes the mothers might be blamed for it. These ideas can cause the child with clubfoot to be excluded from the family and society. It is important to explain to the caregiver that children with clubfoot are a valuable part of the community and that their deformity is not caused by their actions.

7. Deafness

Hearing impairment has a number of possible causes, for example a middle-ear infection that can easily be treated /prevented. Many children with undetected hearing problems are mistakenly thought of as having learning difficulties. Children with learning issues should therefore have a hearing check.

Some signs of partial or complete deafness are whether a child responds to noises or if they cup their hand to their ear to hear.

One simple hearing test involves making noises behind a person's back (left/right) to see if they respond. Another involves speaking loudly from a distance and asking the client to repeat your words to determine if they were heard.

If in doubt, always refer a client for further specialised tests. Early detection of hearing problems is vital for possible treatment and learning to communicate – orally or adaptively.

Oral communication can be supplemented by gestures, diagrams, reading, writing and lip reading. This is called "Total Communication".

Sign language and finger spelling are ways of using the hands to communicate words and letters. Whether a child should be sent to a specialist school to learn sign language depends on many factors. Help the child, parents and the school discuss the pros and cons of a specialist school before they make a final decision.

8. Epilepsy

Epilepsy is a chronic or long-lasting disability. It is characterised by recurrent, unprovoked seizures. Seizures are also called fits. A seizure, or fit, is a sudden change in electrical activity in the brain, affecting a person's appearance and behaviour. There are many forms of epileptic seizures and hence many forms of epilepsy. Recurrent epileptic seizures may come apart in hours, days, weeks or months. The cause of epileptic seizures is often not known.

Seizures can be frightening to those who see someone having them. For this reason, people with epilepsy sometimes have a hard time gaining acceptance in the community. Everyone in the community should therefore realise that epilepsy is not:

- the result of witchcraft or the work of evil spirits
- a sign of madness
- the result of bad actions by the child or parents or ancestors
- an infectious disease

It is important that children, youth and adults with epilepsy go to school and take part in day-to-day work, play, and adventures in family and social (village) life.

More severe forms of epilepsy result in:

- sudden unconsciousness during a seizure and violent movements of arms and legs.
- The eyes often roll back.

In mild types of epilepsy, the person:

- may suddenly 'blank out' for a moment
- make strange movements, or
- behave oddly.

Epilepsy can thus be dangerous during driving, working, traveling, fetching water and cooking on open fire; thus personal support might be required.

Frequent seizures also have a negative effect on cognitive brain functions. Epilepsy often results in social stigma, low self-esteem and relational difficulties. This, however, depends on the perception of epilepsy in the community. Despite common beliefs, none of the forms of epilepsy is contagious.

9. Leprosy

Leprosy is an infectious disease that affects the nerves in the skin, face, hands and feet. Untreated leprosy can be contagious, particularly to those with a low resistance.

- Children who live with a parent infected with leprosy should be immunised.
- Transmission of leprosy is through 'droplet' – bodily fluids in the air. To prevent the spread of infection, remind infected clients to cover their mouth when they cough/sneeze and dispose of tissues in a bin. A well-ventilated house with plenty of space & light helps to prevent infection.
- It often takes 2 to 5 years (and up to 10 years) for skin patches to appear on infected clients.
- Treatment with long-term Multi-Drug Therapy (MDT) can stop the disease from progressing

if it is detected at an early stage.

- In areas where leprosy is common, check all children and adults regularly and teach the community to look for visible signs of the disease.
- Wounds and ulcers can become infected, permanently damaging the skin, hands and feet. Wounds therefore require rest, hygiene and if open, frequent clean dressing.
- In the case of wounds on the footpad, weight-bearing must be avoided. Wounds on the hands should also be protected (e.g. by wearing cotton gloves).

Specialist tools/aids can be provided to a person by a referral centre to assist with daily living and work.

If the person doesn't have feeling in the eyes, hands and feet, there is an increased risk of getting injured in unclean environments. It is therefore important to regularly clean the environment and remove any sharp objects.

For people with leprosy, as with other people with disabilities, access to water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) are essential for wound care, self-care and to meet their daily needs. However, they might face multiple barriers to access WASH-facilities.

Having leprosy might have a negative impact on people's emotional wellbeing. A person with leprosy-related impairments, who also faces stigma and discrimination, may suffer from depression and/or anxiety. Also, self-esteem and self-worth can be badly affected. Therefore, it is important to pay attention to the personal feelings of the person affected by leprosy. However, try to involve the family members as much as possible and figure out how they can provide appropriate support.

Being given a diagnosis of leprosy can be a life-changing event for both the affected person and their family. They will most likely ask themselves why this misfortune overtook them. For these sorts of questions, they may benefit from consultation with a religious leader.

Religion can also sometimes be a barrier to people affected by leprosy participating in society. The major religions do not themselves discriminate against people affected by leprosy, but followers of these religions can misinterpret what the scriptures say and use them to discriminate against people affected by leprosy.

In many countries there are still laws and regulations that exclude and discriminate against people affected by leprosy. A particular problem is that many countries use thumb/finger prints for casting votes. Sometimes people affected by leprosy have lost their fingers and so have no means of voting.

10. Mental health

Mental health (psychological) problems are a major obstacle to social participation for many people. Psychological problems can be genetically determined or result from traumatic experiences such as sexual abuse, violence or war. Psychological problems are usually treated by a combination of both medical and social/behavioural interventions.

Abuse and trauma may lead to mental health problems in the short and long-term. Moreover, victims are more likely to become perpetrators of abuse in later life. Substance abuse can be either the cause or the result of mental health problems

Both society and health care providers often neglect people with psychological problems. Therefore, great attention should be paid to social education and sensitisation on mental health issues.

Community education should focus on prevention of psychological problems and the inclusion and participation of people with psychological problems in society. Participation in community events, employment and sport can all help with the treatment of psychological problems.

People with poor mental health can suffer from self-stigma, which changes their self-esteem (individual sense of worth) and self-efficiency (individual ability to set and reach goals) in a negative way.

Socially, mental health is often misunderstood, and some communities believe that:

- People with mental health problems are cursed
- Mental health problems are caused by the devil, evil spirits, or other supernatural forces

Because of the social stigma, individuals living with mental illness may delay seeking care. Greater symptom severity is associated with greater perceived social stigma.

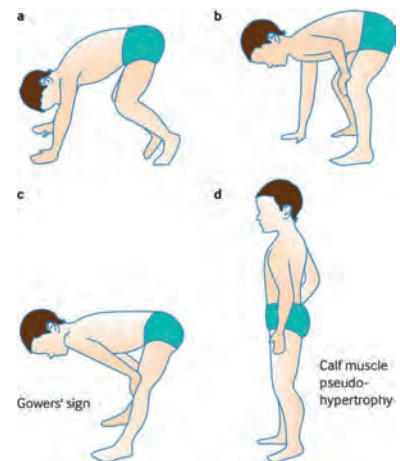
(Religious) beliefs and practices may help people to cope better with stressful life events, give meaning and hope and surround depressed persons with a supportive community. However, in some populations or individuals' religious beliefs may increase guilt and lead to discouragement as people fail to live up the high standards of their beliefs.

11. Muscular Dystrophy

Muscular dystrophy is a condition in which muscles progressively lose their strength. It affects mostly boys, with the first symptoms occurring between 3 and 5 years old. Muscular dystrophy does not respond to medication. A person with muscular dystrophy will usually die before age 20 from heart failure or pneumonia.

Early signs are uncoordinated walking, falling and sometimes tip-toeing. By age 10 most children with muscular dystrophy are unable to walk. One of the first signs of the disease in children is 'Gower's sign' – a way of standing up using hands on thighs for support. Muscles get progressively weaker over the years, affecting all areas of the body.

It is best to be honest with both the child and the parents about the disease. Parents and children with muscular dystrophy will require ongoing support to find solutions to the challenges of daily living. As postural muscles get weaker it is important to ensure the person with muscular dystrophy is well supported. A wheelchair with a backrest slightly tilted backwards may enable a person to remain socially active. Pillows/supports may help prevent sideways curving of the spine. Persons with muscular dystrophy should avoid heavy muscular activities as these can increase the physical problems. Try to maintain mental stimulation through daily tasks and activities.



12. Post-polio Paralysis

Polio is a viral infection that can damage the nerves that control movement in the arms, trunk

and/or legs. Nerve damage from polio may result in paralysis, but the person may partly or completely recover from the paralysis within 7 months. Polio does not affect feeling or mental ability.

There are no medications to treat polio during the original illness. Treatment consists of rest and providing nutritious food. Prevent contractures (permanent shortening of the muscle or joint tissue) by straightening the trunk, arms and legs while the person is resting.

It is important to continue both active (done by the person themselves) and passive (supported by the caregiver) range of motion exercises after the original illness.

While range of motion can be maintained in bed, other exercises can be continued in supported sitting positions or even in water. The person may need a wheelchair to overcome a period of immobility. Walking can be practised progressively supported by parallel bars, a walker, crutches or a cane. A brace/caliper may be needed to avoid hyperextension – overstretching of the knee that causes damage to the joint.

13. Spinal Cord Injury

Spinal cord injury is a rupture or severe damage to the nerve cord that comes from the head and runs down the backbone. As a result feeling and movement below the level of the injury is lost or reduced. How much of the body is affected depends on the level of the injury along the backbone: the higher, the greater the loss of function in the body. In Diagram 1 the horizontal lines depict the area of spine injured, the parts in red show the function loss.

If the rupture of the spinal cord is complete, loss of function is permanent. If there is a partial rupture of the spinal cord, some feeling (sensation) and function may remain, and the client may partly or entirely recover. Persons with spinal cord injury are susceptible to 3 major medical risks:

- Skin/pressure sores (prevented by changing lying positions)
- Urinary infections
- Contractures.

Urinary infections can be prevented by drinking lots of water and emptying the bladder regularly, with a catheter if necessary (Diagram 3). Contractures can be prevented by undertaking range of motion exercises. Train a person with a spinal cord injury to lift themselves to enable independent movement (Diagram 4). As the medical and functional effects of spinal cord injury are complicated, always refer to specialist institutions to help manage a client's medical, functional and social needs.

14. Stroke

Stroke is caused by a blood clot or rupture of a vessel in the brain. Stroke may result in paresis (weakness/spasticity of muscles) or complete paralysis of one side (the opposite side) of the body. As the brain is affected, mental functions may also be impaired (e.g., reasoning, distinguishing senses, behaviour). As with many conditions, stroke affects not only the person but also their family and/or carers. It is important that all parties receive support. Most recovery occurs in the first 3 months after a stroke. Impaired balance often causes spasticity. This can be minimised by ensuring the person is in a stable position (e.g. on a bed, in a chair or standing with an aid). Ensure that the recovering person receives the proper balance between rest and activity. A daily plan can be established to slowly build capacity levels. Taking part in social activities/interaction is often the most important part of recovery.

Help individuals and their families search best ways to overcome problems in daily life:

- Promote independence by encouraging use of the unaffected limbs (e.g., by using walking aids or a wheelchair that can be operated with one arm/leg).
- If a person has swallowing problems (e.g., coughing during feeding) consider which food and fluid consistencies that cause the least trouble for the person.

Community or Congregation Disability Scan

Reputable organizations such as the World Bank and the World Health Organization estimate that in any given community approximately 15 percent (15%) of the people experience disability. The high percentage refers however to people with impairments such as problems with vision, which with relatively simple intervention such as glasses can be solved. With this scan we don't expect that you will identify all those people with minor forms of impairment. Rather we expect and hope that you will focus on those disabilities that are more serious, more complex or even may be stigmatizing ones that leads to discriminatory practices.

Question which you should or could ask in doing the scan:

- Who are the people in our community that are disabled?
- What are their disabilities?
- What are their difficulties?
- What are their needs?
- What are their hopes and dreams?
- How can we as church council, pastor or congregation respond to those needs?
- If we as congregation won't be able to adequately respond to those needs are there people, institutions or other resources that could help them? Which ones?

NB: In doing this scan it is of utmost importance to listen very well, ask questions in a respectful way.

Disability awareness and inclusion survey

This scan can be a useful tool to find out which persons (adults and children) – with what type of disability – are member of your church and in how far they are participating in church life. As such it will give you an idea of the level of inclusiveness of your church. It is best to first write down the names of all church members with a disability that are known to you as church council. Write down their disability as well. In the first column of the table below you will notice the most common different types of disabilities. It however could be that someone in your church has a rare disability e.g. Albinism or Elephantiasis. If you know the condition do write this down as well. This can be done under question 2.

The next step is to mark (with an X) for each person in the specified row if he or she is participating in the various church activities. It could be that one person is active in one or more activities. Mark in that case all the relevant activities.

1. Do you or someone in the church has a disability? Y / N

2. What is the disability of you/your fellow church member?

-
-
-
-
-
-
-
-
-

3. To see how you/they are included, complete the following survey and mark the relevant section with an X:

How inclusive is your church?								
Aspects of church life	Attending sermons but no special provisions available	Attending sermons: relevant special provisions are available	Participating in bible study	Fellowship at Holy Communion	Member of choir or music band	Involved in specific ministries e.g. outreach	Member of church council/ leadership	Leading sermons
Type of disability								
People with physical disability								
Children with brain damage and parents								
People with mental/ intellectual disability								
Blind people or those with visual impairment								
Deaf people or those who are hard of hearing								
People affected by leprosy								
People with epilepsy								
Other disability: Do specify which one! • • • •								
Family member of child or adult with disability								

4. In order to fully participate in church life do you/does the person need:

- Transport to church
- Special assistance during the service
- Special appliances
- Respite care
- Help at home
- Other, please specify _____

5. If your friend or family member would like to attend this church, what changes, if any, should we make?

- A parking place specific for a person with a disability
- Better accessibility (please specify... e.g. a ramp, wider doors)
- A sign language interpreter
- Large print Bibles
- Better sound equipment
- Better lighting
- Wheelchair space and unobstructive aisles
- Adapted Bible study opportunity for people with a learning or intellectual disability
- Church sermons directed at people with a learning or intellectual disability
- Support for a child with a disability to attend the children's program such as Sundayschool
- Other, please specify _____

Welcoming People with Disabilities in our Church

One example of disability inclusion is found in Mark 5:24–34, Luke 8:40–47, where Jesus encountered a woman who had been bleeding for 12 years. The bleeding was her impairment, which would have left her seriously anaemic. By Jewish law she was considered to be unclean. The negative attitudes she would have faced would have been barriers to her participating in normal life.

As she reached out to touch the fringe of His garment, Jesus welcomed her presence. Through her encounter with Jesus, she was empowered and included in her society.

Jesus' life emulated inclusion for all people, including those with disabilities.

Here are some practical ways that we can welcome and include people with disabilities and their families.

Encourage participation

- Gain a greater understanding of the diversity and complexity of disabilities.
- Actively reach out to people with disabilities and their families.
- Support the capacity of people with disabilities in leadership and decision-making roles.
- Adjust programs and activities so that people with disabilities are fully included.

Identify and reduce barriers

- Reduce the attitudinal, physical, communication and institutional barriers for people in the contexts of our ministry.
- Include people with disabilities in ministry and mission activities.
- Consider additional ways to meet specific needs.

Plans and resources

- Develop a disability inclusion plan.
- Allocate budget for inclusion.
- Raise awareness and educate.
- Allocate inclusion responsibility to staff and volunteers.
- Monitor and evaluate.

Disability Etiquette

Basic disability etiquette involves treating people with disabilities with respect. For example, speak to the person directly, not to the person accompanying them. Do not make assumptions about what they can or cannot do.

Basics

- Treat everyone as you would like to be treated.
- Focus on the person, not the disability.
- Know that most disabilities are not obvious.
- Treat a mobility device, such as a wheelchair or electric scooter, as an extension of the person and as part of their personal space.
- Ask before you help someone if the person needs assistance.
- Be sensitive about physical contact.
- Think before you speak.
- Don't make assumptions about what the person can (not) do.
- Respond graciously to requests.

The individual should come first, as (s)he is more than her/his disability. The disability (or assistive device) is secondary.

Similarly, people without disabilities should be referred to as such, instead of those who are 'normal'.

Example

Name of title	+	Preposition or verb	+	Disability of assistive device
Child, student, adult, person, customer, applicant, etc.		With Has, uses, etc.		Down Syndrome, autism, leprosy, etc. Wheelchair, walker, etc.



THE MOST APPROPRIATE LABEL IS
USUALLY THE ONE PEOPLE'S PARENTS
HAVE GIVEN THEM.

Disability	Outdated Language	Respectful Language
General Disability	Handicapped or the disabled	Person with a disability
No Disability	Normal, healthy	Person without a disability, typical
Blind or Visual Impairment	Dumb, Invalid	Blind or visually impaired, person who is blind/visually impaired
Deaf or Hearing Impairment	Invalid, deaf-and-dumb, deaf-mute	Deaf or hard-of-hearing, person who is deaf or hard-of-hearing
Speech/Communication Disability	Dumb, "one who talks bad," mute	Person with a speech/ communication disability, person who communicates with alternative devices or eyes
Learning Disability	Retarded, slow, brain-damaged, "special ed," learning disabled	Person with a learning or cognitive disability
Mental Health Disability	Hyper-sensitive, psycho, crazy, insane, wacko, nuts	Person with a psychiatric disability, person with a mental health disability
Mobility/Physical Disability	Handicapped, physically challenged, "special," deformed, cripple, gimp, spastic, spaz, wheelchair-bound, lame	Person with a mobile or physical disability, person who uses a wheelchair or mobility chair, or is a wheelchair user
Emotional Disability	Emotionally disturbed, crazy	Emotionally disabled, person with an emotional disability
Cognitive Disability	Retard, mentally retarded, "special ed," autistic child	Cognitively/developmentally disabled, person with a developmental disability
Short Stature, Little Person	Dwarf, midget	Someone of short stature, little person
Health Conditions	Victim, someone "stricken with" a disability (i.e. "someone stricken with cancer" or "an AIDS victim")	Survivor, someone "living with" a specific disability (i.e. "someone living with cancer or AIDS")

<https://s3.amazonaws.com/dg-library/Disability-Etiquette-Guide.pdf>

People Who Use Wheelchairs or Have Mobility Impairments

- Offer to shake hands when greeting someone.
- Don't lean on or touch someone's wheelchair.
- Place yourself at eye level when in conversation.
- People who use canes, crutches or other assistive devices use arms for balance. Refrain from touching them or moving an object around them unexpectedly.

People Who Are Blind or Visually Impaired

- Identify yourself and allow the rest of the group to do the same.
- Offer your elbow if someone needs to be guided; don't take his.
- Walk on the opposite side of a guide dog or cane.
- Give specific, non-visual directions.
- Orient people with visual impairments using numbers on the face of a clock.

People Who Are Deaf or Hard of Hearing

- Follow the person's cues to find out if she prefers sign language, gesturing, writing or speaking.
- Before speaking to a person who is deaf or hard of hearing, tap on her shoulder or wave your hand to get her attention.

- Use a normal tone, speak clearly and distinctly.
- Rephrase, rather than repeat, sentences that the person doesn't understand.
- Use facial expression, body language and pantomime.
- If a sign language interpreter is present, speak directly to the person who is deaf, not to the interpreter.
- Be prepared to write notes to communicate, if necessary.

People with Speech Disabilities

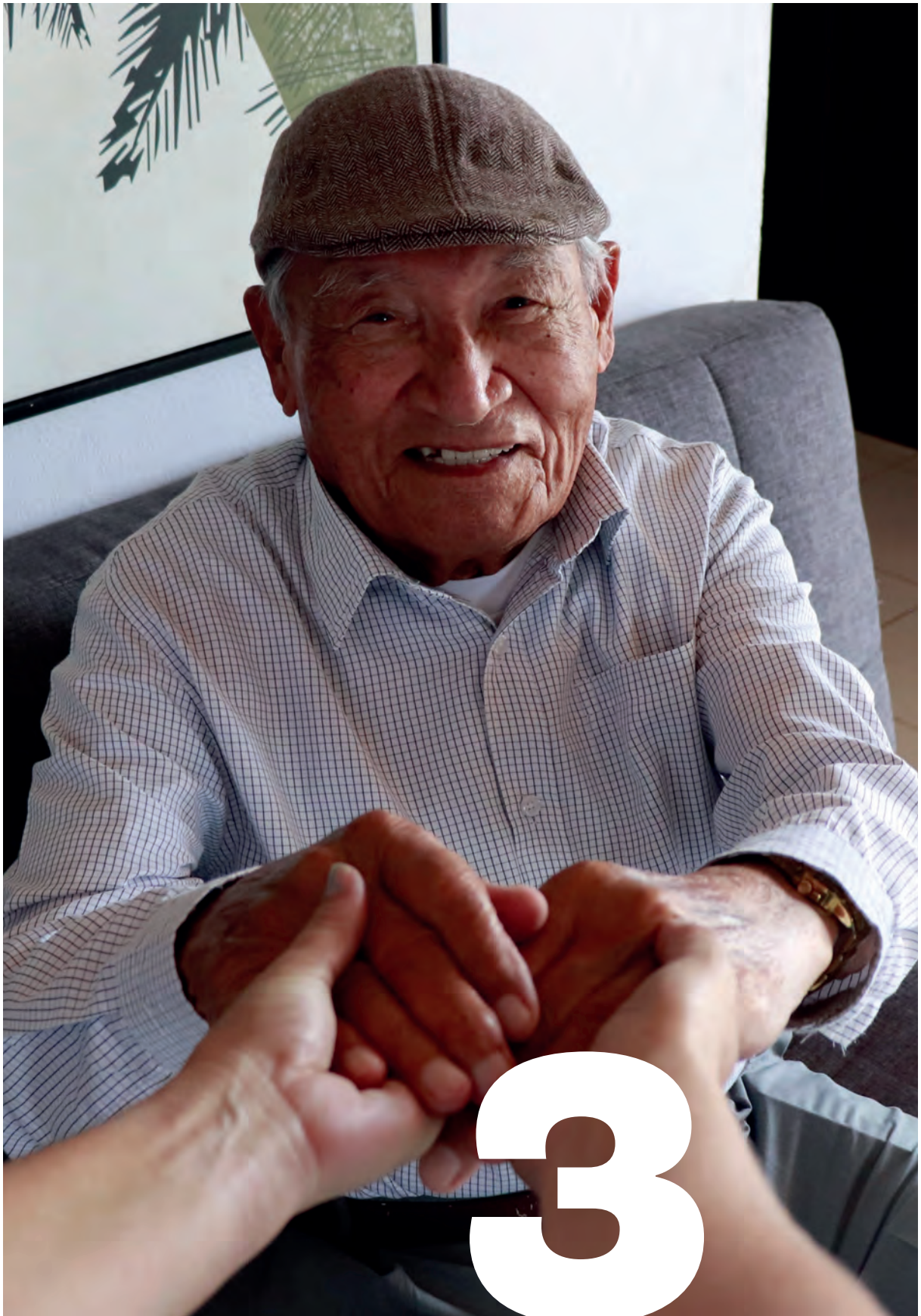
- Give the person your full attention and be patient.
- Don't interrupt or finish the person's sentences.
- If you are not sure whether you have understood, you can repeat for verification.
- If, after trying, you still cannot understand the person, ask him to write it down or to suggest another way of communicating.

People with Developmental Disabilities

- Speak to the person in clear sentences, using simple words and concrete concepts.
- Rephrase comments or questions for better clarity.
- Stay focused on the person as he responds to you and be patient.
- Avoid talking about a person with a developmental disability when he is present.

References

- "Disability Etiquette – Tips on Interacting with People with Disabilities" United Spinal Association www.unitedspinal.org
- "Pathways to Success for People with Disabilities" Rory A. Cooper, PhD; Diane Collins, Elaine Houston University of Pittsburgh, School of Health and Rehabilitation Sciences
- Lecture notes Enablement Foundation



Case studies

Case study

Jasmin - a Child with Cerebral Palsy

Jasmin, a 7-year-old girl with Cerebral Palsy, lives in a small rural village in South India.

In 2022, after a community facilitator came across Jasmin, she was enrolled in the ABC Learning Programme, an early learning project. However, her participation in the programme came to a halt when the family relocated because her father found employment in a town across the river. Fortunately for Jasmin, the community facilitator started visiting her at home to provide therapy. Initially Jasmin could only sit in one place. However, with support from both the community facilitator and her mother, she started to crawl and was soon standing without help. During one of the home visits, the community facilitator wanted to know why such a bright girl attended neither school nor went to the church which was located close to her home. The mother was surprised that this was an option for her daughter.

“How can my daughter learn... and go to school?” she wondered.

Subsequently the school authorities agreed to admit Jasmin when they were approached by her mother and the community facilitator. She was provided with books and uniforms by the government. A disability organisation supplied a wheelchair to facilitate movement to and from school, and the neighbourhood children were happy to push Jasmin in her wheelchair to school every day.

Jasmin's life improved steadily thereafter. She made friends and did quite well at school.

Assignment

For the last 2 years you have been the pastor or elder of the local church which Jasmin's family attends. It is a fast-growing church. You have spoken to the family a couple of times, usually after the sermon, and are aware that their children go to Sundayschool. It is only recently however, that you are informed by a non-family member about the existence of another child, apart from the 3 who attend Sundayschool.

1. Why were you unaware of this child's existence? Do you find it strange?
2. What will you do?

You talked to the parents and found that they love Jasmin, but you sense that they find it difficult to talk to others about her.

3. What could be the reasons?
4. Is it your responsibility to do something about it? What will you do?
5. The school has given Jasmine a lot of support; what support should the church provide?

Case study

Kiran – a Boy with a Spinal Cord Injury

Kiran is the firstborn son in a family of 7, who live in Nepal and are members of a small church.

Kiran was a very good student at school which he attended until he turned 15 years old. When Kiran was 17 years old, he had an accident while working in the mountains. He broke his back and suffered a Spinal Cord Injury which left him paralysed, unable to walk, and without any sensation in his legs. His upper body was fortunately not affected. Kiran was hospitalised for some weeks after the accident, but soon returned to live at home with his parents in a small village in the far West. He usually lies in bed, and hardly ever uses the wheelchair he has. The skin of his legs does not look healthy; in fact there is a lot of odour and it is likely that he has bedsores.

Although Kiran's family home only has a ground floor, it is not easily accessible for him: there are steps to enter the house or to move from one room to the other or go to the washroom. His parents help him with most things, but he is able to eat by himself. His parents are poor. They have a small shop where they sell vegetables from their field, as well as eggs and sometimes a chicken or pork from the livestock they own. Their shop is open in the evenings, at which time Kiran is in his bed, concealed behind the curtains, because his parents are afraid that they will not be able to sell goods if people see him. The neighbours know about Kiran, but he is almost completely hidden away and does not participate in any community activity.

The church members (should) know about Kiran's condition. Although they prayed for healing soon after his accident, a few years down the line hardly anyone enquires after his health when they meet the parents who attend church services regularly, every Saturday morning.

Assignment

1. Read the case carefully and make personal notes about the problems/challenges which you observe in the life of Kiran and his family.
2. Discuss the story of Kiran in small groups and agree on the problems identified.
3. If you are the pastor or elder of the church Kiran and his family belong to, what could and would you do to make sure that Kiran's wellbeing improves?

Case study

Maya – a Widow with Physical Disability

Maya, a 33-year-old woman with physical disability, lives in a shack close to the church building in a big town in South India. She has three children, between three and nine years of age. Her husband died just before the birth of their youngest child. He was the sole breadwinner of the family, working as a daily labourer. Maya had poliomyelitis when she was young. As a result of explicit discrimination from the community, she was not able to find work and tried to stay at home as much as possible, keeping away from the public eye. After her husband's death, Maya had to search for employment. She was unsuccessful as the discrimination she faced earlier had not gone away. The family was evicted from their rented house when they did not have the means to pay and they started to go hungry every day. Maya was forced to make a shack from plastic to live on the street next to the church.

Maya said, "It has been three years now, we are dependent on worshippers' charity for little money or food. I am worried everyday about putting something to eat in my children's mouths. When it rains or when one of us gets sick, we cannot go out for begging. In such cases we do not have any other choice but to stay hungry for many hours or even days."

"When I was a child a local health officer told me that my disability happened because I did not take proper vaccination," said Maya.

She added, "But it breaks your heart when you hear people explicitly speak to each other that you are different and cursed."

Assignment

You are the pastor or elder of this church and every time you walk to church you pass by the shack in which Maya is living. One day you see her sitting in front of her shack with her three children and all of a sudden you realise that this woman looks deeply depressed; she looks worried and hardly pays attention to the environment. What can and will you do?

Case study

Prakash – a Young Man with Leprosy

Prakash, a well-educated young man in Nepal, has deformities of his hands due to leprosy. He has a certificate that qualifies him for certain jobs in public service. To maximise his chances of getting a much-wanted teaching job, he registered at a vocational school in Pokhara and obtained a proficiency certificate on completing the training.

In spite of having a second diploma, Prakash was unsuccessful in getting any teaching jobs. He was often invited to attend job interviews at public schools that were impressed by his qualifications. On meeting him however, employers were put off by the visible signs of leprosy and would not hire him.

After three years, Prakash landed a job with a public school. He was overjoyed and began his teaching assignment very enthusiastically. Unfortunately, after some time the headmaster fired him. Apparently, parents of the children in Prakash's class heard that he had leprosy and were afraid that their children would get infected. Also, some of the teachers had filed a complaint and requested that Prakash be stopped from teaching. They told the headmaster that Prakash could not be a good teacher, as only sinful people were infected with leprosy. In the last few months, they had started to avoid Prakash and ignored him during meetings. To make matters worse, some school children spread the rumour that he had stolen money from the school.

The headmaster explained to Prakash that even though he was convinced Prakash was a great teacher, he was compelled to fire him in order to avoid trouble with parents and teachers. Prakash was very upset and angry, but he understood the headmaster's decision and let the matter go. He now lives with his parents again, and they provide his daily needs.



Assignment

Discuss the problems Prakash is facing. You are on the council of a large church in Pokhara. How can you help Prakash?

Case study

Kumari – a Girl with Leprosy

Kumari lives in a village in a hilly district in India.

At the age of 13, she first felt a tingling sensation in her right foot but paid no attention to it. Then she discovered a small wound under the big toe that was not painful. On showing it to her father, she was taken to the village healer who performed a ritual and gave her an ointment to apply for several months. The wound did not get better; instead it increased in size. Kumari's father bought her a pair of canvas shoes to prevent other people from noticing, and another ritual was performed. In the meantime, vague skin patches started to appear on her right thigh and on both shoulders. Also, the tingling started up in her left hand. A year passed, during which time Kumari's hand became numb and weak, and her ring finger and little finger started to bend slightly. One evening she overheard a conversation between her parents and an uncle, suggesting that she may have "kustharog" (leprosy). They agreed that this should be kept secret, to save the family's reputation. The following day, Kumari was taken out of school. She was only 15 years old and was told that she was now old enough to work in her father's grocery shop.

The family spent a lot of money on offerings and on various treatments from local healers, but the disease continued to spread. When Kumari was 17, she was pledged in marriage to a second cousin from another village. Her hand deformity and the foot wound were explained away as the result of an accident. When her mother managed to convince her father to take her to the hospital in the nearby town, Kumari was finally diagnosed with leprosy. Her treatment began and she was told to report for examination every month. Unfortunately, the groom's family started asking questions about her regular trips to town. When Kumari's family ran out of excuses, she stopped her treatment for fear of being 'discovered'. She also stopped attending weddings and other public gatherings, with the excuse of being 'too busy in the shop'. Before long, however, the rumours spread, and the groom's family called off the wedding. Business declined in the shop as customers started buying their groceries elsewhere. In desperation, the family took her to a leprosy hospital, a day's journey from their village.

Assignment

1. List the problems Kumari has at this moment or may face in the foreseeable future. Use your imagination to include problems that are not explicitly described, but that you think she is likely to experience. What do you think would be her main concern?
2. Based on the problems that you described earlier, what kind of interventions would you offer to Kumari (and her family and/or community)?
3. Which cultural and possible religious ideas may influence her ability to participate in community life? What are the helping factors? What are the barriers? Explain your answers.
4. What strategies could be used to reduce stigma in situations like Kumari's?



Games

The Game of Life

Introduction to the Game of Life

Story is a powerful means of conveying your message. And it is used to great effect in this visual representation of discrimination. It helps to reinforce concepts raised.

When the story begins and students start to think about whether an infant with disability would be as welcome as an infant without a disability, you can talk about some of the prejudices surrounding disability – and some of the causes of this stigma. Throughout the story there are many opportunities for raising issues of concern. So, it is helpful if you prepare well by researching local attitudes, beliefs and challenges.

This is the activity where the main point of the training course ‘hits home’. People have been transformed by this activity. Having a tea break afterwards is good, as students often wish to discuss and reflect on the issues raised here with each other and need a little time for the message to absorb. This can make the final part of the afternoon especially productive.

Method

Setting up the room is important. You may need to spend time re-organizing the chairs. You will need enough space for four people to stand side-by-side, with the other students seated around the edges of the room, facing towards the volunteers. Creating a ‘corridor’ in the middle of the room, enabling you to use the full length of the room for the exercise, is ideal.

1. Ask for four volunteers from among the group (ideally, two men and two women), willing to stand for about 30 minutes to represent the following groups:

- Men without a disability
- Women without a disability
- Men representing a group of people with a particular disability e.g. Cerebral Palsy
- Women representing a group of people with a particular disability e.g. being blind

Alternatively you can assign roles since practice learns that some people don’t grasp the idea immediately. Below you will find a few suggestions.

Possible Roles that can be assigned when playing the Game of Life

1. You represent a group of **people affected by leprosy**. This disabling disease can become manifest from childhood to old age. It is a highly stigmatizing diseases and can make people very disabled. People usually fear persons affected by leprosy.
2. You represent **children who got measles at the age of 6 years and became blind** due to the measles.
3. You represent a group of people with **congenital malformation** such as missing hands/arms or legs. So immediately after birth parents realise that their child is disabled.
4. You represent people who are **deaf**.
5. You represent **children with Cerebral Palsy**. Cerebral Palsy is a common condition. The brain damage causes multiple disabilities first of all movement problems but often combined with intellectual problems too.
6. You represent **girls/women with psychiatric/mental disorders**. They show strange behaviour.
7. You represent **young boys who got a spinal cord injury** due to an accident and now are paralysed on both arms/hands as well as legs/feet.
8. You represent **young people with epilepsy**.
9. You represent **children with intellectual disabilities**.

1. Stress out that this is NOT a role-play exercise – the volunteers will be representing a group of people from within a village. Many people do not like role-play, hence the need for reassurance!

2. Assign each volunteer a role. Explain how you will be telling a life story, taking the characters on a journey from birth to old age. As you reach each significant life event, you will ask them to respond as they think their character (or their family) would react. They will need to take:

- Two steps forward for a very positive or very successful experience.
- One step forward for a positive or successful experience.
- One step back for a not-so-positive or not-so-successful experience.
- Two steps back for a negative or unsuccessful experience.

Once your volunteers understand what they will be required to do, reinforce they are re-presenting a group of people, so they should respond accordingly. Encourage them to avoid thinking about specific impairments or basing decisions on their own life experiences. Also, their response should be based on what they think is currently accurate for their culture and situation – not what it ought to be.

After each life stage and volunteers' responses, allow time for the others to react and comment. If there is disagreement, the group should decide by consensus and the volunteer may be asked to alter their move. The facilitator's role is to assess when to intervene and comment to clarify reasons for decisions and to bring out and discuss any prejudicial points. The specific impairment is not relevant to the main point of this exercise, so try not to focus on this too much. It won't alter the essence of the activity.

Set the scene for the story. Since you want to emphasize links between disability and poverty, consider placing the story in a typical village. Describe it in as much detail as you can, explaining that income poverty levels are generally quite high – although most families have land and access to safe water. For entrepreneurs, opportunities exist in the nearby town where there are also health and educational facilities.

3. Start with the first life event, as if telling a story... ask for comments and suggestions from the rest of the group.

(Explain prior to the game that those representing people with disabilities should realize that during *this first step the person not necessarily has a disability which is visible or recognized already*)

'One fine day, after a long wait of nine months, your character is born. How does your family feel when they see who you are? Make your moves.'

Note what might happen:

The family is very happy (you represent a son born without a disability), the person **takes two steps forward**.

The family is happy (you represent a daughter without a disability), the person takes **one step forward**.

The family is not happy (you represent a son with a certain disability), **one step backward**.

The family is very unhappy (you represent a daughter with a certain disability), **two steps backward**.

'Now you are a bit older, and it is time to start thinking about school. How likely is it that you will be able to attend school? Make your moves.'

'You are born in a Christian family. How likely is it that you will attend church sermons on Sundays? Make your moves.'

'Now that you are at an age that you can attend Sundayschool. How likely is it that you will be able to attend Sundayschool? Make your moves.'

'Now you are 12 years of age. How likely is it that you will be able to attend secondary school? Make your moves.'

'Now you are 20. You'd like to get married or form a relationship. How much do you think this will be possible for you? Make your moves.'

'You like to keep busy and want to make some money for your family. You try to get a job. How easy will it be for you to find one?'

'A few years go by. Everyone in your age group is having babies. How much will this be a possibility for you?'

Check if the woman with a disability takes two steps back or is instructed to do so by the group. Why did this happen? They may say it is because most women with a disability are physically unable to have children – a common myth.

Two steps back may well be an accurate response for a different reason – women with a disability often don't have children because society thinks they can't or should not.

'Now you're in your 40s. You have a lot of experience of life. You want to help your community by becoming involved in local politics. How likely are you to achieve this goal?'

'You are in your 40s and your church is looking for new elders. How big is the change that they will ask you to become an elder? Make your moves.'

Ask the group:

- Who is in the best position now? Who is in the worst place?
- Volunteers, how does this make you feel?
- Does any of this surprise anyone?
- Is it helpful as a tool for reminding us that disability and social exclusion seriously affects people's abilities to avoid poverty?
- The man without a disability at the front of the exercise is regarded as living in poverty – what does this imply for people with disability?

The most powerful way to end this session is to ask the group to look once again at where the characters are standing. Recall that this was all taking place in a rural location where general levels of poverty are quite high. Even though the characters without a disability are well ahead

of the ones with a disability, they are by no means wealthy. Ask the group – who benefits from your development programmes at the moment?

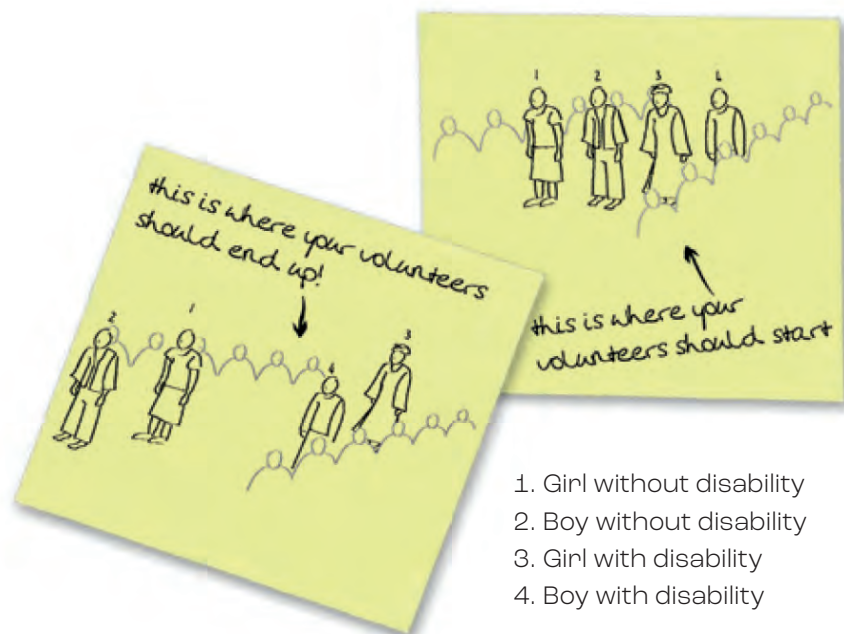
Motive

Including people with disability is an important issue for poverty reduction – that is the message of this session. It should help show why they are especially vulnerable to chronic poverty. It also provides you as facilitator with a good opportunity to talk about many different development issues that affect people with disability – but which rarely get discussed.

To many, this session will dramatically reveal things about their communities which they may never have considered before. It can be fun. Humor can take the edge off the hard facts exposed by the game. But some students can find it distressing because it makes plain some painful, personal truths.

Critical point for trainer

1. It is important that people volunteer for their roles. In some situations, religious or traditional beliefs may preclude some from participating. Be aware and respect that. In some cultures, even to imagine having a disability can be seen as 'tempting fate'.
2. In groups with students with and without disability, this activity can have additional sensitivities. So, it is really important students feel comfortable enough with each other to honestly explore the situation from their perspectives. Be aware of this if you are a person without a disability and it is the first time you have worked with people with disability.



Reference: Travelling together, Introductory Disability Inclusion Training Course, World Vision Australia, June 2022.

Simulation Training

It is difficult to simulate diversity of experience, but you can and should stimulate diversity

A warning: short duration of disability simulation activities fail to convey many of the persistent, long-term challenges of people with disabilities in their daily life. The way that these exercises simulate disability is overly simplistic, missing the complexity of people's real, lived experience. One-off simulations, while usually well-intentioned, and coming from a place of respect, can't account for the full spectrum of disability. People can experience the same type of disability to different degrees, or they may have a combination of disabilities. But disability simulations typically limit participants' abilities in a single, specific way. If participants are blindfolded, the implication is that all blind people see nothing at all – when, in reality, some blind people have no vision and others can perceive general shapes and colors.

Additionally, each person may relate to their disability differently. How an individual perceives their disability may depend on the types of assistive technology and other accommodations that are available to them, the education they have received, and their social background. While disability simulation activities tend to encourage participants to empathize with the difficulties people with disabilities face, many individuals have a neutral or positive relationship with their disability. This discrepancy stems in part from the fact that disability simulation activities tend to focus on the initial shock of losing certain abilities, rather than the ongoing experience of living with a disability. When participants only understand disability in terms of loss, they may treat people with disabilities with pity, failing to respect the rich and complex reality of their lives. And respect is crucial for moving from awareness and empathy into informed action – which we'll explore in the next section. Still, on basis of experiences during a training in South India we see some value in simulations as long as the above points will be part of the discussions.

Based on literature about the subject of simulation we strongly advise to use the simulation as a problem-finding exercise. Some of the examples that came from the Indian training were:

- Blindfolded people had difficulty eating and were much helped by fellow participants giving instructions.
- Someone with an immobilized right arm wasn't able to use his right hand to eat and either had to resort to the left one (which is not done in India) or had to ask for a spoon which he eventually decided to do.

Simulating Blindness by Blindfolding

It is for sighted people good to experience what it is like to be visually impaired or blind. There are various reasons to go through such an experience, including the pursuit of empathy and understanding, promoting awareness, personal growth, and the pursuit of social change in society. To explore this experience, there are various temporary simulations/experiences you can explore. While blindfolding someone is a simple procedure there are these days various glasses available that simulate specific types of visual impairment.

Simulating Mobility Impairment

Participants can spend time – maybe even an entire day – using a wheelchair, immobilizing one or two legs or one or two arms in which participants can attempt to experience the barriers persons with disabilities may encounter while performing everyday tasks.

Simulating Hearing Impairment

Participants can spend time with a headphone or ear plugs to simulate hearing impairment.

Role Play Inclusion of People with Leprosy

A few members of our church identified a group of persons with (disabilities) leprosy in makeshift homes at the outskirts of the town/city. Some of them are Hindu; others are Christians. What they have in common is that they are living apart from their families and live in miserable conditions. They struggle to meet essential needs of their families.

Assign one person the role of pastor; 3 persons form the church council; there are 3 church members; and 2 professionals i.e. the Leprosy Control Officer and Social Worker. Each group should get their roles and shouldn't share this with others.

You have 3 rounds of role play whereby the groups come together and use the brief outline as a basis for playing their role. However, be creative!

After the 3 rounds there is the last round with all participants. Demonstrate how your church could facilitate the inclusion of this group of persons into church and community.

Pastor

- Vehemently object to any attempt to include this group in church life during your first meeting.
- Thoroughly examines/interrogates the church members during their visit to request you to accept the group in your church and help them to live in the immediate neighbourhood of the church.
- Give ultimately your approval and address your conditions to accept the group in your midst.

Church Council

- After they held a council meeting, they propose to have a meeting with the group of people who identified those people with leprosy to hear their views and weigh the arguments in favour and against helping them. They are confused as the pastor is in fact against any action and yet they feel that they have a biblical mission to take care of the least of their brothers and sisters.
- They consulted other pastors and health care workers and feel that they have no option then to welcome these people in their church but realise that they need to educate the congregation first.
- After enlightening members the congregation about the need to respect and create equal opportunities within church they unreservedly support any activity by the church to serve and welcome these people.

Church members

- During the first meeting: 25 percent opposes all appeals from the ones who found this group of people with leprosy to allow this group to live in your community and come into your lives. They want to meet the church council and express their concerns about risks for infection.
- After one of the elders made it clear that leprosy is not a punishment from God, nor a super-disease and a nurse told you that leprosy – when treated – is not infectious you slowly become convinced to accept the request of the other church members.
- Finally you accept to co-operate and get involved in activities to involve the group in your (community) life and embrace the ones who wish to become part of your congregation. You

embrace them as your brothers and sisters and literally hug them.

Leprosy Control Officer and Social Worker

- Explain the position of government regarding equal opportunities of people with disabilities; explain current legislation about discrimination. Plead for co-operation and inclusive developments.
- Provide education on relevant issues in leprosy you feel they need to know in order to influence attitude and behaviour.
- Let the church council know that they are more than willing to cooperate and work in close collaboration with them in improving the wellbeing of this group of people with leprosy.



Sermon outlines

A Biblical view on disability

How does the Bible speak about people with disabilities? Reading the Bible we may sometimes think that the Bible discriminates against people with disabilities or that people are punished by God with disabilities. In other parts of the Bible we read about healing of people with disabilities and about God's love for vulnerable people. Talking about a Biblical view on disability requires a careful understanding of the Bible as a whole.

1. The big picture

1.1. Creation

We may wonder why God has created the world. We can speculate about the reason why God created the world, but the only reason we find in the Bible is love. Even more specific, it is His love for mankind.

He who created the heavens, he is God; he who fashioned and made the earth, he founded it; he did not create it to be empty, but formed it to be inhabited. (Isaiah 45: 18)

In Genesis 1 and 2 we read about the creation of man and the role given to them. He will have dominion, but this dominion must be god-like, full of love and compassion.

Then God said, 'Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.'
(Genesis 1:26)

'So God created mankind in His own image, male and female' (Genesis 1: 27). Together they were created in His image. As His image they should live in a unique relationship with each other in the presence of God, mirroring His love to this world. It is living in a loving relationship with the triune God, with each other and with the creation as a whole. This peace and wholeness is the essence of God's intention when creating the world.

1.2. The reality of evil

It is clear in the Bible that evil is a reality, it came into the world because man sinned against God.

Sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned. (Romans 5:12)

The story is told in Genesis 3. Fundamental is what we find in verse 8:

And they heard the sound of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day and hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God among the trees of the garden.

And when the relationship with God is destroyed, we are cut off from the source of life. As a result, death and suffering are entering the creation and became present in the lives of all human beings. The world becomes an unfriendly environment, Paradise is lost. The close and loving relationship between Adam and Eve is changing, they are ashamed of each other and start accusing one another before God. The history of mankind became a history full of suffering, evil

and wrongdoing towards the vulnerable, abuse and violence.

Disability is a consequence of the fact this world is a broken reality. Is God the cause of disabilities? We believe that God's sovereignty goes over everything. This means it is used by Him, it is not a hindrance for reaching his goals and for the final coming of his Kingdom!

Sometimes the Bible mentioned Satan's involvement (Job 1). This doesn't demonize illnesses etc, but shows us the same point: the world we live in needs restoration! The world and we need the power of God's grace to get healed.

1.3. God's continuing care

It is true, the world fell in sin, and everything went wrong, but God still loves his creation.

And He still takes care of his creation! It is beautifully confessed in the Psalms. Like Psalm 104:

*24 How many are your works, Lord! In wisdom you made them all.
the earth is full of your creatures. ...
27 All creatures look to you to give them their food at the proper time.
28 When you give it to them, they gather it up.
when you open your hand, they are satisfied with good things.
29 When you hide your face, they are terrified.
when you take away their breath, they die and return to the dust.
30 When you send your Spirit, they are created,
and you renew the face of the ground.*

Because of sin there is brokenness everywhere, we are all subjected to it. Death did come, pain and suffering are part of this world. Still God is involved and full of mercy. Even knowing what is happening, including what mankind is doing, God is merciful and slow in his anger! He is slow in his anger, and willing to be a loving father!

The Lord is gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love. The Lord is good to all, and his mercy is over all that he has made. (Psalm 145:8-9)

*As a father shows compassion to his children, so the Lord shows compassion to those who fear him. For he knows our frame; he remembers that we are dust.
(Psalm 103:13-14)*

God is still caring for his creation and man is still seen as created in his image. God is protecting the lives of man, as He says:

Whoever sheds human blood, by humans shall their blood be shed; for in the image of God has God made mankind. (Genesis 9: 27)

Every human life should therefore be respected at all times. And this applies to all human beings, whoever they are. It is not limited to certain groups of people, we all sinned, we all live broken and fragile lives, but we are also all human and cared for.

1.4. Healing

Suffering is part of this world. It tells us that we need salvation, restoration! C.S. Lewis expressed it in this way: God whispers to us in our pleasures, speaks in our conscience, but shouts in

our pain: it is his megaphone to rouse a deaf world.

However, we do not understand why some people are suffering more than others. It even may seem unjust. This is certainly the feeling of Job! He thought those who are wicked and doing evil, they should suffer more. But God has wronged him (Job 19: 6). God's anger burns against him, and he has alienated his family from him (Job 19: 11, 13). Pain and suffering however did not alienate him from God! He says:

*"Oh, that my words were recorded,
that they were written on a scroll, ...
know that my redeemer lives,
and that in the end he will stand on the earth.
And after my skin has been destroyed,
yet in my flesh I will see God.
I myself will see him
with my own eyes – I, and not another.
How my heart yearns within me!*

There is a deep longing for God who is the One who redeems, the One who heals. His skin is destroyed by his illness, but in his flesh and with his own eyes he will see God. The God who heals (Exodus 15:26) will bring salvation. This healing brings wholeness, shalom, peace. It is the restoration of the relationship with God, each other, and creation. This healing became possible because God himself took the burden in His Son.

*Surely, he took up our pain and bore our suffering,
yet we considered him punished by God, stricken by him, and afflicted.
But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities.
the punishment that brought us peace was on him, and by his wounds we are healed.
We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to our own way.
and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all.*

Healing as the complete restoration of God's original intention for his creation, will only be complete when Christ will come in glory. Then our temporally suffering will be changed in glory:

For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison. (2 Corinthians 4:17)

For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us. (Romans 8:18)

2. Living with disabilities

2.1. What disability is not

It is crucial for our understanding of suffering, healing etc. to keep the bigger picture of the Bible in our mind. It shapes our worldview and our understanding of disability.

It is not a punishment

Disability is not karma; it is NOT a punishment for sins done in a earlier life. It is also NOT a punishment because of our own sins or the sins of our parents. It is true there are some exceptions

in the Bible, like the story of Miriam (Numeri 12:10-16). But in all cases mentioned in the Bible it was clear to them, so it was never a question if this was the case or not! When the disciples of Jesus wondered whether a blind man had sinned, Jesus made it clear that this question was absolutely out of place!

As [Jesus] passed by, he saw a man blind from birth. And his disciples asked him, 'Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?' Jesus answered, 'It was not that this man sinned, or his parents, but that the works of God might be displayed in him.' (John 9:1-3)

Sometimes we may think ourselves that we have sinned and are punished by sickness or something else.

14 Is anyone among you sick? Let them call the elders of the church to pray over them and anoint them with oil in the name of the Lord. 15 And the prayer offered in faith will make the sick person well; the Lord will raise them up. If they have sinned, they will be forgiven. 16 Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective.
(James 4)

It doesn't say that he will be cured, he will be healed. And if he has sinned and he confessed it will be forgiven. This doesn't imply this sin was the reason for his illness. But if he feels there is a need to confess, he is invited to do so and this makes his healing complete.

It is not a curse

We may think that we are cursed because we have a disability. In the Bible we find something like that in Deuteronomy 28. Here we read terrible things that may happen when the people of Israel will forsake their God!

The Lord will send fearful plagues on you and your descendants, harsh and prolonged disasters, and severe and lingering illnesses. (Deut. 28: 59)

When we read it carefully it is NOT a personal curse, not directed to someone but to the nation as a whole and a sign of God's anger. It is the opposite of the peace (shalom) we find with God, and it effects the land and the cities, the harvest, the health of the people. No one should think that he/she is cursed because he/she has a disability!

It is not a hindrance to be a disciple of Christ

Sometimes people feel unworthy because they have a disability. In the Bible it is NOT! A beautiful example is Moses:

*10 Moses said to the Lord, "Pardon your servant, Lord. I have never been eloquent, neither in the past nor since you have spoken to your servant. I am slow of speech and tongue."
11 The Lord said to him, "Who gave human beings their mouths? Who makes them deaf or mute? Who gives them sight or makes them blind? Is it not I, the Lord? 12 Now go; I will help you speak and will teach you what to say." (Exodus 4: 10-12)*

He didn't want to be sent by the Lord to Egypt because he couldn't speak freely, but it was sharply rejected by God!

We find the same with Paul, who was possibly bad-sighted, and he prayed the Lord to cure him.

8 Three times I pleaded with the Lord to take it away from me. 9 But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me. 10 That is why, for Christ's sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong. (2 Corinthians 12:8-10)

So being disabled it was not a hindrance, it was even a reason to serve God as an apostle. In this way it was even more clear to all that it is not about the strength of man, but about the grace of God. Whoever we are, what (in)visible limitations we have, we are all called to be disciples.

People with disabilities may have even a special calling to show the world and their fellow disciples what God's grace is, what faith and hope mean in times of difficulty. In the Bible we find examples of great things done by people with a disability like Samson.

2.2. God and disability

Paragraph 1.1. raises questions that have to be dealt with. It is clear, disability is not a punishment, it is not a curse, it is not a hindrance to be of service to the Lord. We are fully human and cared for by God, as much the image of God as anybody else. We have to look at a text in the Bible that may suggest otherwise.

16 The Lord said to Moses, 17 "Say to Aaron: 'For the generations to come none of your descendants who has a defect may come near to offer the food of his God. 18 No man who has any defect may come near: no man who is blind or lame, disfigured or deformed; 19 no man with a crippled foot or hand, 20 or who is a hunchback or a dwarf, or who has any eye defect, or who has festering or running sores or damaged testicles. 21 No descendant of Aaron the priest who has any defect is to come near to present the food offerings to the Lord. He has a defect; he must not come near to offer the food of his God. 22 He may eat the most holy food of his God, as well as the holy food; 23 yet because of his defect, he must not go near the curtain or approach the altar, and so desecrate my sanctuary. I am the Lord, who makes them holy.'" (Leviticus 21:16-23)

We must see that this doesn't say they are inferior then others. It is the symbolism that is important: everything in the tabernacle and temple should be perfect. The offerings should be without flaw, and the priests too. It only speaks about those who serve as priests. They were NOT excluded from the offerings: they were like the priests entitled to eat from the holy food, even from the most holy offerings. And – by the way – it only talks about visible handicaps, not about people with intellectual disabilities.

The passage says nothing about the rest of the people! They were not excluded. There is only one exception, this is about the 'eunuch' (a man who was emasculated/castrated).

No one who has been emasculated by crushing or cutting may enter the assembly of the Lord. (Deuteronomy 23:1).

Already in the Old Testament God promised to change this rule! We read this in Isaiah 56, and this promise was fulfilled in the congregation of the New Testament (Acts 8:1-10):

And let no eunuch complain, "I am only a dry tree." For this is what the Lord says: "To the eunuchs who keep my Sabbaths, who choose what pleases me and hold fast to my covenant – to them I will give within my temple and its walls a memorial and a name better than sons and daughters; I will give them an everlasting name that will endure forever. (Isaiah 56: 3-5)

The conclusion is clear, people with disabilities are NOT rejected by God. We may even say the opposite. God makes them his servants like Moses and Paul. Another beautiful example is the story of the four disabled men in 2 Kings 7. They became messengers of good tidings to Jerusalem.

2.3. Care and support

Having a disability doesn't mean they are rejected. No, it is clear in the Bible that God is judging the people looking at the way they care for them! There are so many verses in the Bible about God's special care for those who need support. Many times in the Old Testament we find His care for widows, the fatherless and the foreigners.

17 For the Lord your God is God of gods and Lord of lords, the great God, mighty and awesome, who shows no partiality and accepts no bribes. 18 He defends the cause of the fatherless and the widow, and loves the foreigner residing among you, giving them food and clothing. 19 And you are to love those who are foreigners, for you yourselves were foreigners in Egypt. (Deuteronomy 10)

We need to keep in mind that this is not only talking about those three different groups, but of all who are in need, like all who had a disability. If the people take care, they will be blessed (Deuteronomy 14:29). And being disabled is not a curse, but not taking care brings a curse over Israel:

"Cursed is anyone who withholds justice from the foreigner, the fatherless or the widow." Then all the people shall say, "Amen!" (Deuteronomy 27:19)

This message we find everywhere in the Old Testament. The prophets are talking about this all the time:

Learn to do right; seek justice. Defend the oppressed. Take up the cause of the fatherless; plead the case of the widow. (Isaiah 1:17)

In striking words Ezekiel condemns all those who push aside the weak and the vulnerable in chapter 34. He talks about the leaders who are abusing the vulnerable (verse 4-6) and the careless who just take what they think is theirs without looking at those who need help (verse 20-21). And we find the beautiful promise of God:

11 "For this is what the Sovereign Lord says: I myself will search for my sheep and look after them. 12 As a shepherd looks after his scattered flock when he is with them, so will I look after my sheep. I will rescue them from all the places where they were scattered on a day of clouds and darkness. (Ezekiel 34)

And how God cares for those who are vulnerable or need support, we see in Jesus Christ! He called the blind, ushered aside the road:

46 Then they came to Jericho. As Jesus and his disciples, together with a large crowd, were leaving the city, a blind man, Bartimaeus (which means "son of Timaeus"), was sitting by the roadside begging. 47 When he heard that it was Jesus of Nazareth, he began to shout, "Jesus, Son of David, mercy on me!" 48 Many rebuked him and told him to be quiet, but he shouted all the more, "Son of David, have mercy on me!" 49 Jesus stopped and said, "Call him." So they called to the blind man, "Cheer up! On your feet! He's calling you." 50 Throwing his cloak aside, he jumped to his feet and came to Jesus. 51 "What do you want me to do for you?" Jesus asked him. The blind man said, "Rabbi, I want to see." 52 "Go," said Jesus, "your faith has healed you." Immediately he received his sight and followed Jesus along the road. (Mark 10: 46-52)

Set aside by the people, called and respectfully treated by Jesus. And this is the example for the church. Within the church everybody counts, no matter who they are – with or without a certain disability – they are all members. And like in the Old Testament the quality of the church depends upon one question: How do you treat those who need special treatment, because God has given them the greater honor?

21 The eye cannot say to the hand, "I don't need you!" And the head cannot say to the feet, "I don't need you!" 22 On the contrary, those parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, 23 and the parts that we think are less honorable we treat with special honor. And the parts that are unpresentable are treated with special modesty, 24 while our presentable parts need no special treatment. But God has put the body together, giving greater honor to the parts that lacked it, 25 so that there should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other. 26 If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it. (1 Corinthians)

The Image of God in the Bible

God's original intention when He created human beings becomes clear in Genesis 1 and 2. He created them in relationship with Himself (1:26). It is about:

- Love and care from God to them
- Responsibility and love from man to God
- Knowing God intimately and reflecting His holiness in everything

He placed them in the garden of Eden, a place of harmony and peace. This relationship is about:

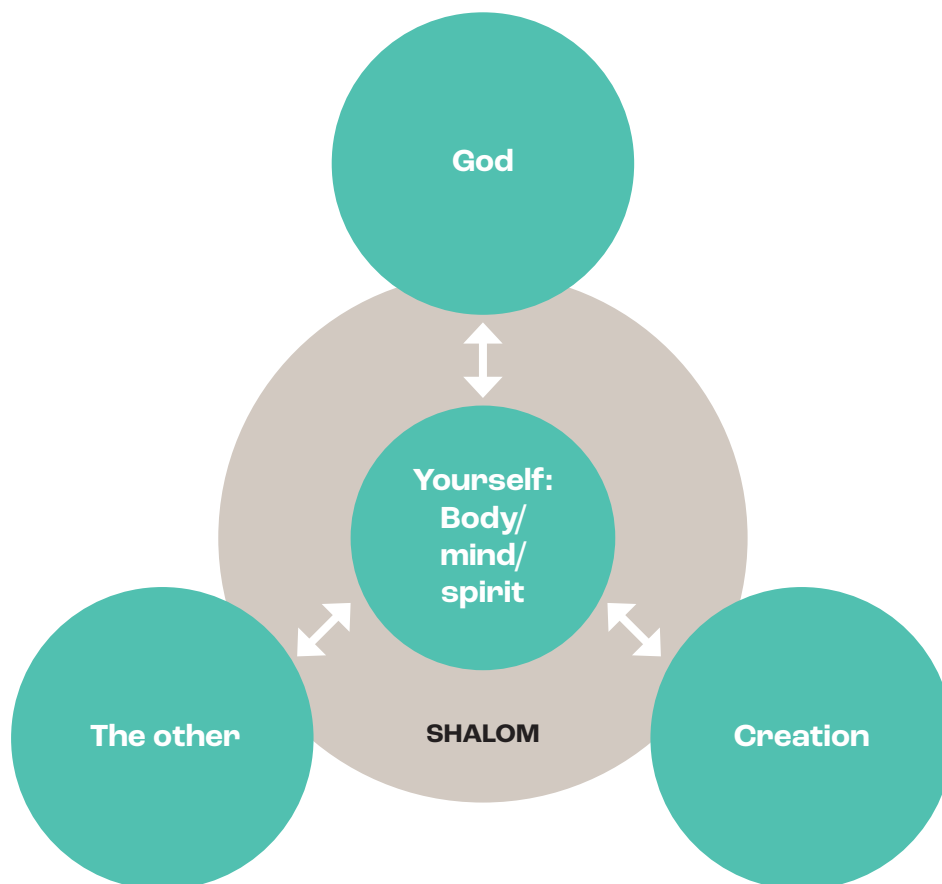
- Responsibility, taking care of God's creation and being responsible to Him.
- Being provided by nature with everything they need.
- Peace and harmony with creation, including the wild animals.

Man was created in relationship with others. Man and wife were created together as the image of God. This relationship is about:

- Reflecting their relationship with God
- Their mutual responsibility for the world
- Their love, respect and care for each other

You see also the different aspects of a human being: he/she is body, psyche and spirit. He/she needs a balanced life in order to be healthy and in harmony with others, creation and God.

God's intention



The Reality

To understand Biblical teaching we also have to understand that the intention of God is still the same, but it is NOT our reality! Evil/sin came in and destroyed everything. It started with the relationship with God! It broke due to sin.

- man did no longer reflect God's holiness
- he did no longer love God but put himself in the first place
- he was no longer living in God's light but in darkness
- His knowledge of God was distorted

The relationship with creation changed fundamentally.

- Harmony disappeared and fear came in
- Man did no longer use nature but start abusing it
- He did not see himself as the user but as the owner of everything

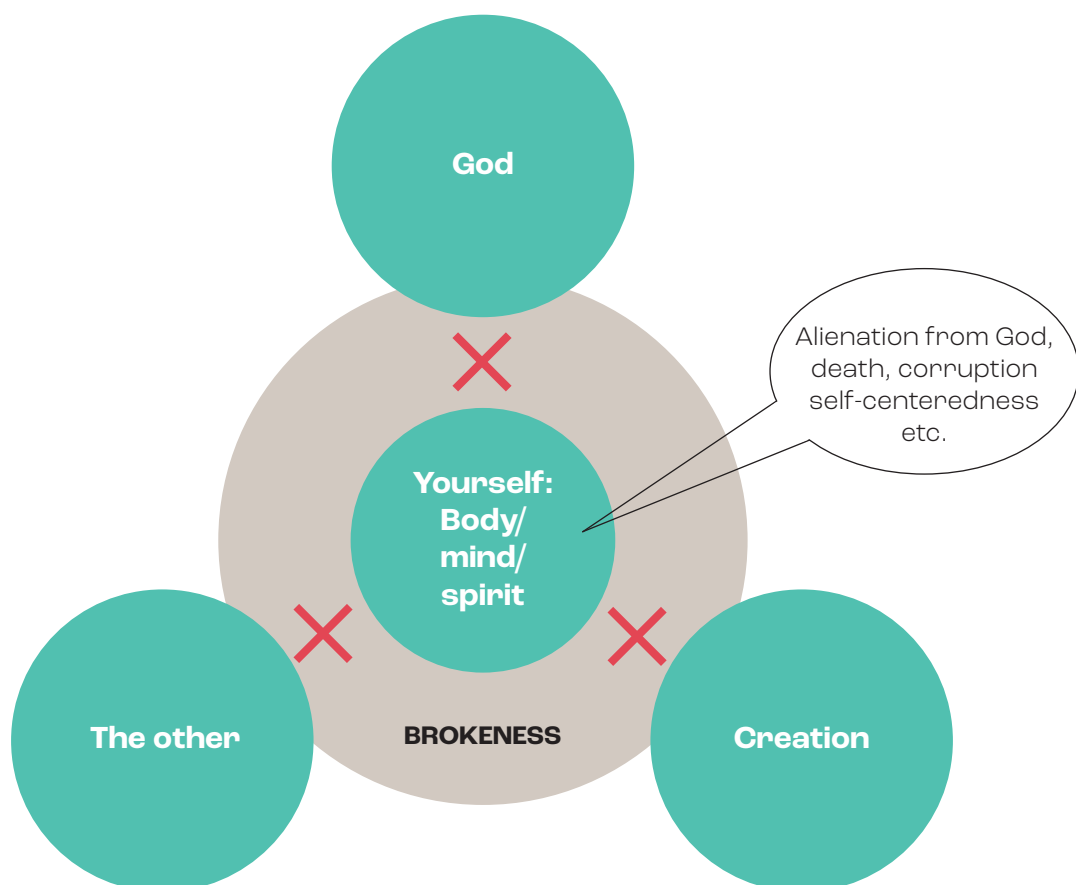
The relationship with the other changed too:

- Love and care changed in distrust and selflove
- Power came instead of unity and mutual responsibility

This is all the effect of the change of man because of his rejection of God and the impact of that on him/herself. His body, psyche and spirit were corrupted by sin. Subjected to death. Not only human beings are corrupted, the same is true for the others and creation (we read in Genesis 3).

This is true for everyone!
This has nothing to do with your abilities, your being male or female, your ethnicity etc. This is true for all of us. All our strength is weakness for God, all our best deeds fall short to His glory.

The reality

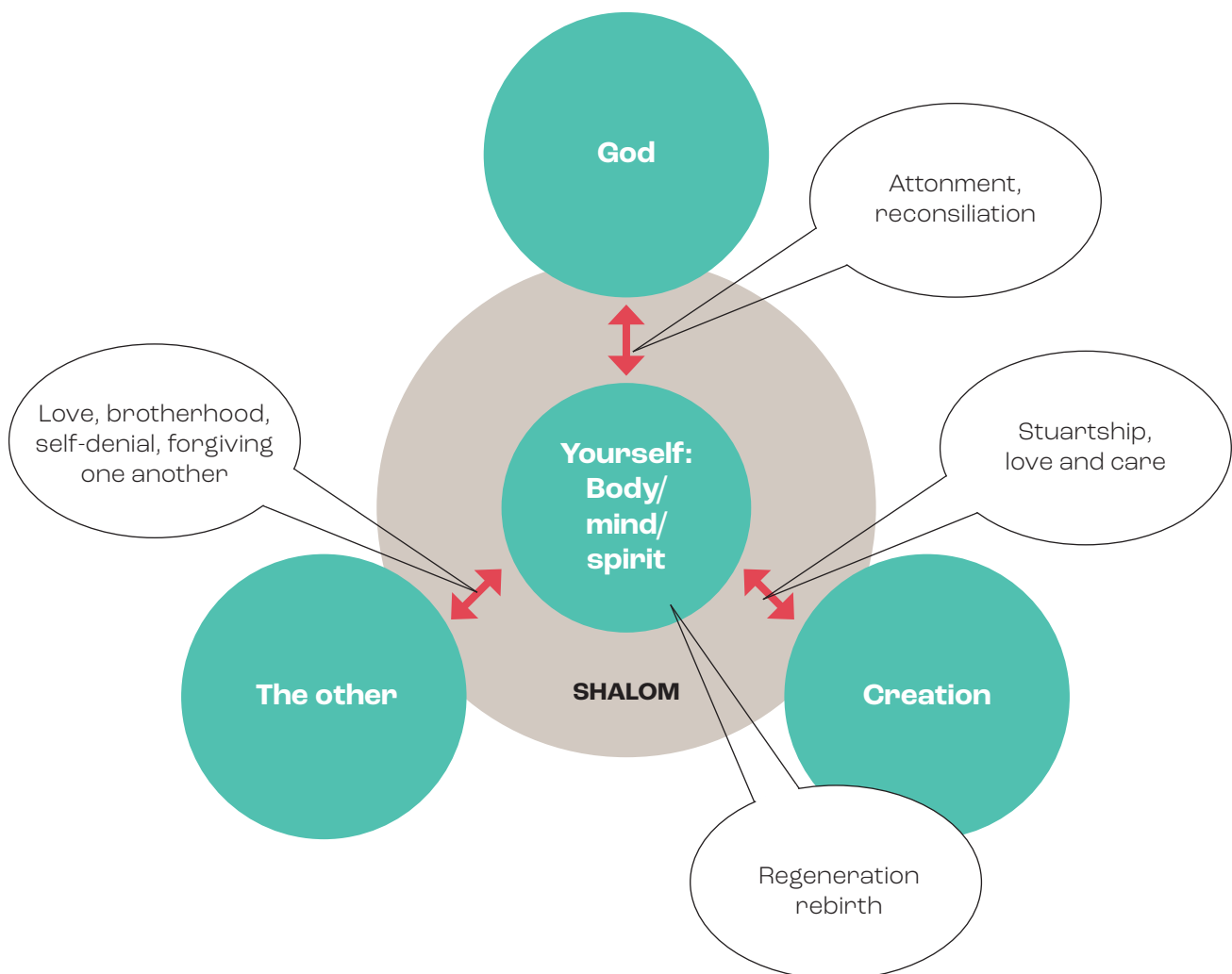


The Restoration of the Image is Healing

The restoration of the image is HEALING! being. When He/she is saved the relationship with God is restored, He starts knowing God, loving Him and obeying Him. Spiritual healing is taking place (but not in the full, we long for the future when we will know Him like He is). When our relationship with God is restored, we look different at creation and start to take care, we start to love the other again. It is impossible to love God and not to love those around us, even our enemies.

Healing of our psychological condition and our body is possible, but like the healing of our relationships always partial. We are still part of this world and subjected to its limitations and we are in pain longing for the full redemption. When Jesus comes back and His kingdom will be revealed in glory, everything will be healed completely! This is the prophecy in the Old Testament and the hope of the New Testament.

Healing



Bible verses that may inspire you in your Sermons about Disability

Exodus 4:10-12

But Moses pleaded with the Lord, "O Lord, I'm not very good with words. I never have been, and I'm not now, even though you have spoken to me. I get tongue-tied, and my words get tangled." Then the Lord asked Moses, "Who makes a person's mouth? Who decides whether people speak or do not speak, hear or do not hear, see or do not see? Is it not I, the Lord? Now go! I will be with you as you speak, and I will instruct you in what to say."

Psalms 139:13-14

For it was You who created my inward parts; You knit me together in my mother's womb. I will praise You because I have been remarkably and wonderfully made. Your works are wonderful, and I know this very well.

Deuteronomy 27:18-19

Cursed is anyone who leads a blind person astray on the road.' And all the people will reply, 'Amen'. 'Cursed is anyone who denies justice to foreigners, orphans, or widows.' And all the people will reply, 'Amen'.

Leviticus 19:14

Do not curse the deaf or put a stumbling block in front of the blind, but fear your God. I am the LORD.

Luke 14:12-14

Then he told the man who had invited him, "When you give a luncheon or a dinner, stop inviting only your friends, brothers, relatives, or rich neighbors. Otherwise, they may invite you in return and you would be repaid. Instead, when you give a banquet, make it your habit to invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, and the blind. Then you will be blessed because they can't repay you. And you will be repaid when the righteous are resurrected."

John 9:2-4

Rabbi," his disciples asked him, "why was this man born blind? Was it because of his own sins or his parents' sins?" "It was not because of his sins or his parents' sins," Jesus answered. "This happened so the power of God could be seen in him

Romans 5:12

Just as sin entered the world through one man, and death resulted from sin, therefore everyone dies, because everyone has sinned.

Mark 8:23-25

Jesus took the blind man by the hand and led him out of the village. Then, spitting on the man's eyes, he laid his hands on him and asked, "Can you see anything now?" The man looked around. "Yes," he said, "I see people, but I can't see them very clearly. They look like trees walking around." Then Jesus placed his hands on the man's eyes again, and his eyes were opened. His sight was completely restored, and he could see everything clearly.

Matthew 15:30-31

A vast crowd brought to him people who were lame, blind, crippled, those who couldn't speak,

and many others. They laid them before Jesus, and he healed them all. The crowd was amazed! Those who hadn't been able to speak were talking, the crippled were made well, the lame were walking, and the blind could see again! And they praised the God of Israel.

2 Corinthians 12:9

But He said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness." Therefore, I will most gladly boast all the more about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may reside in me.

Corinthians 4:17-18

For our momentary light affliction is producing for us an absolutely incomparable eternal weight of glory. So we do not focus on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.

Romans 8:18-22

I consider our present sufferings insignificant compared to the glory that will soon be revealed to us. All creation is eagerly waiting for God to reveal who his children are. Creation was subjected to frustration but not by its own choice. The one who subjected it to frustration did so in the hope that it would also be set free from slavery to decay in order to share the glorious freedom that the children of God will have. We know that all creation has been groaning with the pains of childbirth up to the present time.

Romans 5:3-5

And not only that, but we also rejoice in our afflictions, because we know that affliction produces endurance, endurance produces proven character, and proven character produces hope. This hope will not disappoint us, because God's love has been poured out in our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us

2 Corinthians 12:9

But He said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness." Therefore, I will most gladly boast all the more about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may reside in me.



Bible studies

Sermon: 'Created in God's image'

Genesis 1: 26-28

Genesis 2: 4-16

Comments

All religions have their own versions about the origin of man. It may be a good idea to refer to those stories in your sermon and contrast them with the message of the Bible. Science attributes the origin of human beings to evolution: man developed from primates and is not different from other animals. What is the message of the Bible? Mankind is created by God. He created both male and female in His image. To understand this, some points are crucial:

1. 'Made in God's image' does not mean we look like God, because God is a Spirit. It is not about how we look, but about who we are. It is not important how we look or what our capabilities or disabilities are.
2. God created male and female. Both were created as the image of God. Gen. 2:20 shows how Adam and Eve were created to support each other. We are social beings who need one another and should help each other. It may even be related to God's being. Gen. 1: 26 says: 'Come let US make mankind'. God Himself is a God of love: the Father loves His Son, and His Spirit is love itself.
3. God gave man dominion over the world, such that he should rule over everything (Gen. 1: 28). 'Ruling' does not mean exploiting, it means taking care. It is explained in Gen. 2:15: 'They have to dress it and keep it'. It is all about loving and caring for the things God has created. God created the world out of love, and He created man to be His representative on earth.
4. Sin entered this world and destroyed the image of God in man. Man's very essence was love, but this changed completely. People began to love themselves, they started to mistrust each other, and relationships were corrupted by hatred (immediately we read about Cain killing his brother in Gen. 4). God's love was no longer reflected by them.
5. In Gen. 9 we read: 'Whoever sheds human blood, by humans shall their blood be shed; for in the image of God has God made mankind.' God still sees us as created in His image, and He still wants our lives to be respected. We are called to love one another. Jesus summed up all the laws in the Commandment: to love God and your neighbour (Matthew 23: 37-38).
6. Jesus Christ is the true and full image of God (John 12: 45). Living as the true image of God, He especially loved the people who were disrespected by others, like tax collectors, sinners, and people considered to be unclean. He shared His love with them, showing God's love in this broken world.
7. We ought to follow Jesus' example and become like Him. In this way we become images of God again, showing something of God in this world, especially in the lives of those who need us.

Outline

Introduction

What is the origin of man? Some people believe that mankind evolved from animals and that there is no fundamental difference between humans and animals. Others believe that the soul of man is divine, so we are equal to the Gods, and we will finally become Gods ourselves. The story of the Bible is different. How does the Bible view human beings?

1. The image of God

The Bible tells us about the Creation of the world in a beautiful way. In Gen. 1. God created heaven and earth, the trees and the animals. After this, He said, 'Let us make mankind, male and female, in our image, in our likeness'. The Triune God – Father, Son and Spirit – created mankind as male and female, wanting them to love each other as well as all Creation. By doing so they would, like mirrors, reflect God's love in the world.

We are social beings; we need love, and we need to give love to others. God not only loves mankind, but He also loves the whole of His creation. That is why He called mankind to rule the world (Gen. 1:28). This is not the same as exploiting the world. What is meant by ruling the fish, the birds, the animals, the Creation, is explained beautifully in Gen. 2: 15. Adam and Eve are called 'to dress it and to keep it', which means to love the world and to take care of it. Created in God's image, they are called to do His work by loving and caring for each other and for the world they live in. They are called to reflect God to the world around them by mirroring His love.

2. The shattered image

When we look around, we wonder whether this beautiful picture is true today. Do we really see that kind of love between people? Even married couples do not always love each other like that. We may even see hatred! And parents sometimes abuse their children.

We know Adam and Eve fell in sin, and after that everything went wrong. Cain, the son of Adam, killed his brother. Death became part of this world, and everything was corrupted.

The mirror image was now shattered and broken. It became impossible to see the original! The world was bad, people were killing each other, and people forgot their Creator. But God said (Gen. 9:6): 'Whoever sheds human blood, by humans shall their blood be shed; for in the image of God has God made mankind.' God looks at the broken mirror and says: They are still human beings! All of them!

This teaches us that we are all the same. We may be different in many aspects, but we are created by God, and He still sees us like that! This may be fundamentally different from what most people think. They – even we – may think we are more important than others, more human, because of what we have or what our abilities are.

3. Called to love

We may be broken and God's image shattered but says Jesus in John 3: 16: 'For God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life.' God wanted to restore that image, and He did this by sending His only Son. This is grace and eternal love!

Once we understand that love of God, we start loving Him and our neighbour, even our enemy. When someone asked Jesus what the most important Commandment was, Jesus answered

him: 'the fulfilment of all the laws of God is to love God and your neighbour' (Matth. 22: 37-39). Loving God and loving each other is the key to being human. We return God's love to Him by loving those who need that love.

The teaching of the Bible means a lot to all of us. If you are struggling with a disability, or you may have a child with a disability, the message is clear. They too are created in the image of God; they too are loved by God. That love is given freely and not because of any quality a person may possess. So there seems to be one thing we all can do: give love! Love to God our Creator, love to Jesus our Saviour, love to the people around us. And when we learn to love and care for others, the image of God in us is restored.

Sermon: 'The God who heals'

Genesis 3: 17-19

Exodus 15: 22-27

Comments

To understand healing in the Bible, it is important to understand the fundamental human condition. Our human condition can be described as 'fallen in sin'. We read about the fall of Adam and Eve in Genesis 3. From verse 17 we read about the consequences of this rebellion against God. The first consequence was that Adam and Eve hid from God and lived in fear of Him; the second was that they no longer supported each other but were accusing each other. God told them the world would become a hostile environment in which mankind would struggle to survive and would be subjected to sickness, pain and death. Finally, they were driven out from Paradise into the wilderness. So, theologically speaking, the Fall means that our relationship with God was broken, the relationship between people was broken and our relationship with Creation was destroyed.

In light of this we have to understand the concept of healing in the Bible. We may use the word 'healing' to mean being cured from illnesses, but in the Bible the word has a much wider meaning. It refers to the restoration of what is broken, and it always includes the restoration of our relationship with God. The Bible calls this Shalom, peace. Sometimes people may get cured from an illness, but are not healed in this deeper sense. And the other way round: they may be healed but not cured. So, healing is more than cure! It is not temporary and not partial; it is everlasting and complete. We look forward to the everlasting peace God will bring.

Outline

Introduction

How do people think about 'healing'? It is good to share examples of God's work in the lives of people who were healed – sometimes miraculously, sometimes with the help of the doctors at the hospital. But not all are cured. This may give rise to many questions. We have to understand what healing means in the Bible.

1. A broken world

Summarise the story of the Fall of Adam and Eve. We see how the condition of man changed, from living in the perfection of Paradise to living in the wilderness outside Paradise. We have to explain that sin had an impact on all aspects of human life. The impact is on all our fundamental relationships: with God, with our fellow men, with nature, even with ourselves! You may give some examples from your own experience.

All brokenness we experience has to do with this human condition. We are vulnerable and mortal. We will all die one day. We may have different limitations, illnesses, broken relationships, pain and sorrow, but they all tell the same story. In the end we will all be dust. Whatever we do, we will never be able to restore Paradise. We may try, but at the end we fail.

2. A God who heals

There is another story to tell – the story about God. Man broke the relationship with God and the whole world suffered the consequences, but He did not leave it there. The Bible is the story of a God who decided to stay involved with His Creation; He wanted to restore peace.

We read the story about the people of Israel. They were slaves in Egypt but were delivered by God and brought through the Red Sea on their way to the Promised Land. He chose to be their God, but they needed water on their journey. Water is lifesaving when you are in the desert. They found water, but it was bitter (in Hebrew 'Marah'). They grumbled against Moses and –to be honest – against God.

They got a message from the Lord (verse 26): 'Listen carefully to the Lord, and then you will not be punished like the Egyptians.' The diseases He talks about are the ten plagues, not only sickness, but also the hailstorm, the darkness and the flies; God will not destroy them. The meaning is not that there will be no sickness, no pain, no suffering in Israel, but it will not destroy them as it did the Egyptians.

Why was God doing that? Because He is the One who heals! He did not want them to die; He wanted them to live and walk in His ways, listening to His commands. This is His character. The Lord took care of them on their journey: He made the water fit to drink by showing Moses a log which turned the water sweet. And after this He brought them to a place of water in Elim.

God was healing the water and restoring their relationship with Him, as well as asking them to stay close to Him on their way through the desert. God wants to heal, to bring wholeness in the lives of His people.

Healing of our problems and illnesses is only temporary; we will be thirsty again! God not only gives us what we need sometimes, He even cures our illnesses, but He always wants us to be close to Him.

3. Full healing

Knowing God and staying close to Him is essential. Jesus' words about Himself tell us everything. He calls Himself the living bread (John 6: 35), the living water (John 7:38). We need Christ to restore our relationship with God. When we have faith in Him, we will have this life everlasting. This also restores our relationship with others, because we listen carefully to His words when He tells us that we have to love our neighbours and even our enemies (Matthew 5:43-44). Our relationship with nature changes too. We no longer see the world as our possession, but as His Creation and we become stewards in His kingdom.

This Kingdom is, in a way, still hidden! We still live in a world full of pain and misery, we still will die and all those we love will die too. But we know Christ is risen from the dead, His Kingdom will come! We pray for signs that His Kingdom is coming: signs of hope, cure, healing, and also for the fulfilment of all His promises when we say:

Our Father in Heaven,
Hallowed be your name,
Your Kingdom come,
Your will be done,
On earth as it is in Heaven.

Sermon: 'Exclusion'

Ezekiel 34: 1-6; 10-24

Comments

One of the most painful issues for people with disabilities is exclusion. Being excluded may take many different forms. There may be all kinds of prejudices: they are thought to be sinners or they are impure. Sometimes they are even perceived to be cursed and a danger to others. Therefore, they are unable to get proper education; they are not supported by their communities and are left on their own. Many people with disabilities have no friends; they are not heard, not seen. And finally, they do not get the opportunities to participate in society or even in the church. What God thinks about the whole issue of exclusion is clear from Ezekiel 34.

Ezekiel was the prophet who delivered the Lord's words to the Jewish exiles in Babylon. He was called upon to tell the people of Israel why God had meted out justice to them. One of their greatest sins was the exclusion of people who were in need: the poor, widows, strangers, orphans, including those who struggled with disabilities.

Outline

Introduction

This sermon is about leaders and communities who have no eye for the weak in their society. It is also about God and how God takes the side of the weak. These are texts that really challenge our thoughts and actions!

1. The leaders

Ezekiel was a prophet of Israel during the time of the exile. It was a time of war and people were taken captive to a foreign country. Some of the poor were left behind and they were trying to survive in a devastated country. At such times, the weak suffer the most while the rich manage to get by.

Under those circumstances, God spoke through Ezekiel to the 'shepherds'. The shepherds were those who were in charge in Israel. What they had to do was very clear: they should feed the sheep (verse 2), they should have an eye for the sick, bind up the broken, bring back what had gone astray. But they did not do any of that... they only took care of themselves! They slaughtered the sheep and shaved them bald to benefit themselves.

Israel experienced God's care and help throughout its history. The people knew God had told them to take care of the weak in the same way. Those Commandments were clear enough: widows, orphans, those with disabilities, all needed their care. The leaders had to show the way, but they did not.

Even now leaders tend to take care only of themselves. This may even be the case among people who know about God and His Commandments. It affects those who are vulnerable. They are like sheep without a shepherd. God was angry about this. God says: "I'm against those shepherds" (verse 10)! 'He', says Ezekiel, 'will reclaim the sheep and the bad shepherds will be put out of the way'.

It is a warning to all leaders! Maybe you are a leader in the church or in your family and community. The question is not whether you do well for yourself and your family, but whether the sick are healed under your leadership, the broken bound up, and the lost brought back home. The question is also not about what others do, but what we do!

2. And the people

Verses 16 and 17 are about the whole nation. The strong sheep push away the weak. They trample the grass with their strong hooves; they cloud the water that remains for the weak. If the shepherd is not paying attention, then there is nothing left for the weak. The strong spoil it for the weak.

Why do these things happen between people? Why are the 'strong' inclined to push aside the 'weak' and not give them space? Is it because the strong think they have more right to 'clean drinking water' and 'fresh grass'? After all, they have worked hard for it. They think that they are blessed by God and have deserved it. They blame the others for their own misfortune.

We are called to look at our own behavior! How does our way of living and acting impact others, and especially those who have to deal with a disability? Will they get a chance? Is there room for them to participate in the church? If – like Israel – you know of a God who looks after you and cares for you, would you not give your 'weak' brothers and sisters a chance? What does that say about your relationship with God?

You wonder what Jesus would do.

3. A God who saves

What Jesus has done in His ministry is what God said in Ezekiel 34. What God says is liberating! He removes the bad shepherds from their position, He defends the weak. He Himself will feed the sheep, bind up the broken, heal the sick, take the lame on His shoulders and carry them. He will do this by giving His sheep (and according to verse 19, the weak sheep) a very special Shepherd. And who does not recognize in this prophecy the Good Shepherd himself? Jesus Christ! In His life, His care for the weak was essential. He healed the sick, embraced the excluded, and dined with harlots and tax collectors. And finally, He gave His life for the sheep. This is God standing up for the weak.

This is comforting for all who cannot keep up, who struggle with their disability or disabilities. It gives hope to people who wonder who will take care of their children with disability when they themselves are no longer able to. There is a God who takes pity on the weak. But that does not mean it will work out automatically. It happens where people, by following Him, dedicate themselves to the poor and the weak. It becomes a reality in Jesus and in His kingdom. It is wonderful when 'strong sheep' repent and become servants of their Lord. Then the big become small, the strong become weak and so they become instruments in the hands of the Good Shepherd. Then all the harsh words about false shepherds and sheep who push others away (Ezekiel 34) achieve their goal!

Sermon: 'Is Disability a Punishment?'

John 9: 1-9

Comments

When we talk about disabilities, a painful idea is that those who are suffering are being punished. Is having a disability a punishment or is it not? Parents may think they have done something wrong when they beget a child with disability. People with disability may think they deserve what has happened because of some wrong doing in a previous life. There must be some explanation for having a child with disability or for having a disability themselves. These doubts often arise regardless of one's religion or background. Christians also wonder whether their disability is a punishment from God.

It is important to understand the Bible correctly on this issue. All of us have sinned against God; therefore all of us must suffer the consequences. Illness, death, and pain are part of this sinful and broken world we live in. This reality we find, for example, in Psalm 90: 3-10. Only in a few instances did God punish someone with a certain illness in the Bible, like in the stories of Miriam (Numbers 12:10) and Gehazi (2 Kings 5:27), and the people involved were fully aware of the reason. It is very important to help people understand that disability is part of our broken and sinful world, but not the consequence of a personal or specific sin!

Sometimes a particular disability can even be a sign of God's calling. We read about Moses who was not a fluent speaker and did not feel he was good enough to serve God when he was called. Paul struggled with 'a thorn in his flesh' and thought that it stood in the way when he was sent out as a missionary. Both had to learn that the power of God works through weak and limited people. So, while struggling with our limitations, we may find out what great things God wants to do through us. From this perspective we read John 9.

Outline

Introduction

Explore what people think about those who suffer or have specific disabilities. People may think it is a punishment for things done in an earlier life or by the parents. This may especially be the case when a child with severe disabilities is born. Is this different for Christians? Whom do we blame?

1. What they saw

The text starts with Jesus passing by a man and seeing him. 'Seeing' is a very important word; it is paying attention to the people around you. When we see people, most of the time we do not see who they really are. This was exactly what happened with the disciples of Jesus. They saw a man begging for food and money, and it was clear to them: this man is 'blind from birth'. They did not see the man behind the disability, they only saw a blind man begging. (That he is begging is not mentioned but is implied). This is what normally happens when we meet people with a disability. We only see their disability. We do not see them as human beings, with their own hopes and dreams, pains and possibilities.

Jesus saw the man first of all as a man. It was a man with a disability and therefore forced to beg on the street. When Jesus saw people, he saw with his heart! We read in Matthew 14:14 '(He) saw a great multitude, and was moved with compassion toward them, and He healed

their sick'. The disciples may have felt pity for the man, but Jesus felt compassion. When you have compassion, you want to approach with love and with a willingness to support. When you get close, you feel the pain of the man forced to beg, to live off the gifts of passing people. A man excluded from society, literally pushed to the side of the road.

2. What they asked

The disciples were different. They did not come close but observed the man and asked: 'Who has sinned?' What is the cause of this man's misfortune? It must be the consequence of a sin, either by the man himself or by his parents.

How painful that instead of talking to the man on the road, they talked about him! This often happens when we come across people with disabilities. We do not talk to them; we talk about them. This hurts people. And the question the disciples asked is wrong for many reasons:

- It suggests a direct relationship between sin and disability. This is not the case; we all have sinned and come short of the glory of God (Rom. 3:23). Every human being suffers the consequences: death reigns over all (Rom. 5:14). And this includes the disciples!
- Nor is the sin of the begging man the big issue. That he is not taken care of is the sin. 'Cursed be he that maketh the blind to wander out of the way. And all the people shall say, Amen.' (Deut. 27:18). We should take care of those who are in need, such as orphans, widows and strangers. They should not be forced to beg. This applies also to people with a disability. A good question should be: Who has sinned by forcing the man to beg?
- Lastly, we are all sinners, we all have our limitations. Our strength is only temporary, until we know we are unable to care for ourselves. We all need Grace!

3. What Jesus answered

The answer of Jesus was clear: 'Neither this man sinned, nor his parents'. This does not mean they have not sinned at all, but they have done nothing that explains why this man was blind and begging! This teaching is very important. The Bible does not want us to judge people. We are not here to blame people for things that happen to them and could easily happen to us. When we meet people with disabilities, we should not ask this question at all.

Similarly, if we have a disability or have a child with disability, we should not blame ourselves. We do not know why we struggle or suffer. God is not punishing us for a special reason.

The second part of Jesus' answer is very beautiful: 'The works of God should be made manifest in him'. What are God's works? This can be explained by Jesus' words in verse 5: 'I am the light of the world'. Jesus brings light into darkness. In the blind man's life it meant healing his blindness, opening his eyes and bringing him into the light. Anything is possible; God is all powerful.

Bringing light into the life of people may take many different forms. When people are seen as human beings and no longer talked about and judged; when people who need help, are helped by those around them, when people who are left alone are befriended... These are all light-bringing experiences.

We all know about darkness in our lives, we all need Jesus to be the light in our lives. When He brings light, we discover that He loves us, forgives us, heals us and restores our relationship with God. And we start to love others, forgive others, start to see people differently and start to bring light into their lives too.

Sermon: 'The gift of Friendship'

John 15: 9-16; 1

Corinthians 12: 12-27

Comments

People with disabilities are sometimes not accepted by others. They are pushed aside and excluded from the community, sometimes openly and sometimes by the way they are looked upon or through informal barriers. We must be aware of this and try to make sure everyone is able to participate in the community as well as in the church.

More needs to be done. Even when people have the right to participate and there are no restrictions at all, this does not mean they feel welcome or at home! Feeling part of a group requires that we are connected to others on a more personal level. It simply means that at least one or more persons in that group can be called friends. It is the gift of friendship that makes us really part of a community. Being someone's friend means that we are seen, respected, and needed by him or her.

In the Bible, 'friendship' is something very special. We read about the friendship between God and Moses: 'The Lord would speak to Moses face to face, as one speaks to a friend' (Exodus 33:11). As a friend, Moses was allowed to see something of the glory of God. Jesus calls His disciples His 'friends' when they stay close to Him and obey Him (John 15:14). He says: 'I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master's business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you' (John 15:15). And the ultimate friendship is the willingness to give your life for the other (John 15: 13). The friendship of Jesus with His people sets an example for us to make friends with each other in His congregation. It is about sharing our lives and making everybody count. This will be the focus of this sermon.

Outline

Introduction

How would we feel if we were rich and had everything, but there was no one to share it with? What really matters in life is not what we have, but with whom we share what we have. What is needed to be someone's friend? Is it possible for a rich man to be friends with a beggar? Should friends be more or less the same? How can we learn to be friends? Let us focus on Jesus.

1. Servants

When Jesus was on earth, He called people to be His disciples. Among those who followed Him were 12 special disciples. Most of them were fishermen, like Peter and John. They were busy with their nets when Jesus passed by and said: 'Follow me!' And they left everything behind and followed Him. By following Jesus, they were learning from Him, listening when He was preaching, looking at everything He was doing, serving Him in all the ways He asked. Therefore they called him their Master.

The disciples came from the same area and spoke the same language as their Master. In a certain way they even looked similar to their Master. But a closer look showed there was an enormous difference! Jesus was the Son of God, born as a man from the Virgin Mary. He was all powerful. When He spoke, miracles took place. Even the demons obeyed and feared Him. When there was a storm at sea, Jesus spoke... and the storm was at once quiet. The disciples wonde-

red: Who is this that even the waves and the wind obey him? Yes, He is the Son of God, the King.

Often, when we think about ourselves, we may consider ourselves to be more important than others or, alternatively, that we are worth nothing. One person may be the owner of a big hotel while the other may be the cleaner. The owner is respected by all, the cleaner may be respected by none, BUT we are all nothing in comparison to God or His Son! We are all mortal, limited, and not perfect! If we are honest, we can acknowledge this truth. We can all learn from Christ, by listening to His words and trying to follow in His footsteps.

2. Friendship

In verse 15 we read something unexpected. Jesus calls His disciples no longer 'slaves'; He calls them 'friends'. How is this possible? The eternal Son of God becoming friends with people like this? Even John the Baptist said: 'I am not worthy to put on his shoes!' So, they were not his friends because they were worthy or because they were more or less like him. They were friends because Jesus chose them to be His friends: 'You did not choose me, but I chose you!' (verse 16). He chose them when He passed by them at the beach or wherever they were. To be chosen by Jesus is because of His grace alone, not because one is better than the others.

This is an important lesson: Friendship is a gift! If you think your friend has to deserve your friendship, then it is all about yourself, not about the other. Since friendship is a gift, to whom are you going to offer your friendship? Can you give it to someone who is different from you? Can you offer it to someone who is unable to give you much? As a Christian, can you give it to someone whom no other person wants to accept as a friend? If you are a disciple of Jesus, you have to learn about the gift of friendship from Him. After all, He did offer His friendship (even) to you!

3. Living as friends

What do friends do? What do you do with your friends? Maybe the most important thing is 'talking'. This we read about Jesus too. He talked to them about God, about His Father. He shared with them all He knew about the Father. When you talk with your friends, you share what is most important to you; you open your heart to them. And when you are a follower of Jesus, you will talk about Him to others. You share your faith. What a wonderful thing to do!

Jesus not only shared with them, He also wanted them to love one another. Love is the only way to live like friends. Love is not USING someone but ENJOYING the person's company. This creates the environment to share what is in your heart. Jesus never got much from his disciples, but He loved them anyway and all the way!

Lastly, He wanted them to go and bear fruit. What is the fruit Jesus wants us to bear? When we stay close to Him, He wants us to go out and choose others as our friends; to open our hearts to them, to share our faith and offer them our love. This makes one vulnerable and open to possible hurt and rejection. Jesus knows that; His friend Judas betrayed him! There may be Judases in our lives too, but still this calling comes to us: GO AND MAKE FRIENDS. And we know that friendship can be given to those who are not like us, those who are not seen or respected in the world. Our friendship can be given to those who struggle because they are poor, or struggle with their disabilities, or have a child with a disability.

May God teach us to be more like Jesus!

Bible study

“Created in the Image of God”

1. Getting started

Christians believe that we are all human beings created in the image of God. But what do we mean by this? Is this still true, and is this equally true for everybody? In this Bible study we want to discover more about this. Before we start:

In newspapers you will find cartoons of important people. What makes something a good cartoon? And why will most people feel bad when they see a cartoon of themselves?

We like images that show who we really are! We do not want our image to be distorted by other people. Let us turn to the Bible and find out what the Bible teaches about men as the image of God and how that image was distorted.

2. Read Genesis 1:24-31

God created heaven and earth. He was an artist creating the most beautiful and complex things, and He did this out of nothing. He said to Himself, “Let us make man in Our image, after Our likeness”. God is a Spirit, so we do not resemble God as a child may look like his father or mother. It is not about how we look, but about who we are.

God said, ‘Let us (Father, Son and Spirit) make man’. And He created human beings – male and female –on the sixth day. Although all human beings are created in God’s image, we are also different. Because we are all different, but nevertheless created in relationship with one another, we are social beings who need one another. The most essential thing for human beings is LOVE! Love is the key in the task given to men in Genesis 1:28: ‘They should rule over every living thing’. And ‘rule’ means to take care of the creation! Genesis 2:15 explains: ‘They have to dress it and to keep it’. It is all about loving care. By showing love, people reflect something of the Creator in this world.

Created by God, man and woman were loving God, loving each other, and caring for the world. This was shattered when Adam and Eve sinned by eating fruit from the Forbidden Tree. But we are still people! Genesis 9:6 says: ‘Whoever sheds human blood, by humans shall their blood be shed; for in the image of God has God made mankind.’ We all have the same origin; we are all one family made in God’s image. We must therefore respect and love one another!

3. Discussion

- a. Originally, we were good images of God. When you look at the world of today, we may look more like cartoons! In what ways do you still see something resembling God and in what ways has it been distorted and corrupted?
- b. People with severe intellectual disabilities are also created in God’s image. Can you explain why this is true for them too?
- c. ‘When people mistreat people with a disability, they themselves are not acting as an image of God’. Why is that true?

4. Explanation

Our human history started by being created in the image of God, but nowadays we find that this image is distorted and corrupted. We find self-love instead of love for others. We do not see

much care for the created world; we see more abuse and destruction of the environment. But here the story of the Bible does not end!

Men were created to reflect something of God in this world, but they did not. So God sent Jesus, His only Son, into this world. And He is the true and full image of God. We can see in Him who God is. Jesus said in John 12:45, 'The one who looks at Me is seeing the One who sent Me'. By looking at Jesus we discover who God is and what it means to be the image of God. Let us read one example.

5. Read: Luke 5: 12-16 and discuss

People were very afraid of those with leprosy. They would not touch them. According to the law they would become unclean by doing so. A man with leprosy came to Jesus and asked whether Jesus wanted to cure him. Then we read one of the most impressive texts in the Gospel: 'Jesus reached out his hand and touched the man. "I am willing," he said. "Be clean!" And immediately the leprosy left him.'

- a. Why is Jesus in this story the true image of God?
- b. Being a Christian means we follow the example of Jesus. What do we learn from Him in this story?
- c. Share with each other how you may do this in the church?
- d. Is there something the youth group of the church can do when you think about people in need?

By believing in and following Jesus, we become more like Him! And in that way, we become clear images of God in this world again. And others will discover something of God in us.

Bible study

'Inclusion'

1. Getting started

One of the most important issues for people with a disability is exclusion. People look at them, talk about them, and try to avoid them. This happens to parents who have a child with disability too. Friends stay away, no one wants to visit them, and so on. It is easy to understand how difficult this must be.

Is this something you do too, or do you experience this yourself? Can you share with each other how this happens or how this impacts you?

2. Scripture Reading: Luke 8:40-56

This beautiful story is about an incident that occurred after Jesus returned from a trip to the other side of the Lake. People asked him to come and heal the sick daughter of Jairus, a respected and well-known man, who was the head of the local synagogue. A synagogue is the place where the Jews would come together to read the Old Testament. Jesus – as always – was willing to help and was on his way to Jairus when something happened.

There was a woman who had a terrible sickness. She was bleeding all the time, not just once a month as is usual. This had been going on for 12 years. It had made her also ritually unclean. We read in Leviticus 15: 25-31 that women like her were not allowed to have contact with other people. When it is only for a few days in a month it may be tolerable, but 12 years of exclusion is terrible. This woman was not allowed to mingle with the crowds and go to the village; she had to live on her own. Exclusion for a long-time result in friends and family getting on with their own lives and forgetting about the ones left on the outside.

This woman knew about Jesus and wanted to be healed by touching his cloth. She could not do it openly but hoped to do it surreptitiously from behind. She hoped no one would recognize her and chase her away. The woman got lucky. She succeeded in touching Jesus' cloth and was healed! However some problems remained. Having done something she was not supposed to do; how could she tell the others she had been healed? She would have to remain an outcast, unable to integrate in the community again.

However, Jesus stopped and said, 'Something happened to me, power went out of me!' People like this woman were not allowed to have contact with other people as it was thought they would become unclean too! But Jesus said, 'I'm touched, but I did not get unclean, power went out from me!' Then he called the woman to come forward. She trembled, but when she knelt before him, he said, 'Daughter, your faith has healed you. Go in peace!' He made her his family, not rejecting and judging her! Now she was at peace. Her illness was cured, and she was openly welcomed in Jesus' family. She was no longer excluded and alone; she had been included.

3. Discuss

- a. What types of people are excluded in your own environment? Are they seen as 'unclean' and therefore not allowed to mix with other people? Discuss with one another why this is happening.
- b. Jesus does not become unclean when touched by the woman; it is the other way round – the unclean woman is cleaned. What is the message for the people who are seen by others as unclean?

- c. Jesus includes the woman in Luke 8. When do you feel included in the community and in the church?
- d. What can we do to make other people feel included? What can be done in the church?

4. Read this text from Luke 5: 12-13 and discuss

While Jesus was in one of the towns, a man came along who was covered with leprosy. When he saw Jesus, he fell with his face to the ground and begged him, "Lord, if you are willing, you can make me clean." Jesus reached out his hand and touched the man. "I am willing," he said. "Be clean!" And immediately the leprosy left him.

- a. What Jesus was doing was against the tradition: you were not allowed to touch a man with leprosy. What should we learn from Jesus?
- b. How can we live in such a way that people are not pushed aside but are 'touched'?

Pray together for all those who struggle with exclusion and pray for the love to help people to feel included in your community and in your church.

Bible study

'Exclusion'

1. Getting started

Not everybody has the same opportunities in life. While some people have opportunities to go to school, find a job and start a family, there are others who do not. There may be different reasons for the exclusion of people in society. In this Bible study we think about the exclusion of people with a disability.

- a. If you wish you may start with the 'Game of life'. You can find it in the toolkit.
- b. Why are people with severe disabilities excluded in society? Why are they unable to participate fully?
- c. How are people with a disability participating in the church or are they excluded there as well?

2. Scripture Reading: Mark 10:46-48

In this story we meet Bartimaeus who was sitting beside the highway leading from Jericho to Jerusalem. He was blind and unable to earn a living other than by begging. This is a reality for many people with no other options in society. Bartimaeus was heard crying out for help to Jesus, but people silenced him! He was charged to hold his peace.

Jesus was very different. He heard Bartimaeus calling him and commanded people to bring Bartimaeus to him. Then Jesus asked him, 'What do you want me to do for you?'

This is a question full of respect. He is not just hearing Bartimaeus; he respects him as a person. By asking, 'What do you want me to do? How can I help you?', Jesus gave him the opportunity to express his needs. When people struggle with a disability, they may consider themselves incapable of doing anything worthwhile and therefore hide themselves and keep silent.

Jesus removed the barriers that prevented Bartimaeus' participation. He overruled the crowd that tried to silence Bartimaeus. He even cured his blindness, but that was not the most important thing that happened. Being seen by Jesus made all the difference to Bartimaeus. He was made whole and became a follower of Jesus. What a wonderful story he had to tell the people he met during the rest of his life!

3. Discussion

- a. 'Nobody listens to us!' is a complaint of many people with disabilities. Why is it so important that people listen to us? How can we start listening to people with disabilities in the church?
- b. Everybody, whether living with a (severe) disability or not, is called to share what he/she has learned about Jesus, what he/she has discovered about this love and grace.
- c. What did Bartimaeus discover? What have we discovered in our lives?

4. Read the following story

One day, a Brahmin man bought a male goat from a village. Three neighbors saw him as he was taking it home and decided to play a trick on him. The first neighbor approached him, said, "Hello brother, what are you doing with this dog?" and then walked away. The Brahmin replied, "This is not a dog, it's a goat."

Soon after this, the second neighbor came up and asked, "Hi brother, where are you taking this

dog?” The Brahmin, now a little worried, responded again, “It’s not a dog, it’s a goat.” But doubt began to creep in; he started thinking, “Is it really a dog?”

Finally, the third neighbor approached and remarked, “That’s a nice dog. Where did you get it?” The Brahmin was about to reply, “No, it’s not...” but stopped himself. He thought, “Three people have said it’s a dog. Maybe it really is a dog.” Convinced by the repetition, he left the male goat on the roadside, certain it was a dog.

When people always tell us that we are helpless, we may even start believing them. We need to help each other to take our place in society and church! How can we help one another?

5. Read the following story

Dolmu is an unmarried Christian woman in her early sixties, who still lives with her parents. Her parents converted to Christianity, so she became a Christian in her early thirties. However, due to her physical condition – she was born with short, non-functional legs – she had never attended church. She was also not asked if she wanted to participate in church services like others.

After some years the church recognized its lapse and became more compassionate about serving people with disabilities and actively involving them in church activities. It began to understand the importance of every member’s presence during worship services. For the first time, Dolmu was asked if she wanted to join the regular church service. She was more eager to attend than anyone had anticipated. To accommodate her, the church arranged for a motorbike rider to transport her to and from Saturday services. Now, she attends church services regularly.



Discuss jointly what people with disabilities need in your church or in your family to help them participate as full members of the community.

Bible study

Is Disability a Punishment?

1. Getting started

‘Why did this happen to me?’ This is a familiar question when something bad occurs in our lives. ‘What have I done wrong to deserve this?’ The very same question is asked when we meet people who suffer or have a severe disability. Why did this happen to him/her? What has he/she done wrong?

1. What do people say about people with (severe) disabilities? What reasons do they believe are the cause of a disability?
2. What do you think about it? Is it true or do you think differently?

2. Scripture Reading: Read John 9: 1-9

Jesus and his disciples met a man who was blind since birth. The blind were forced to beg for money because there was usually no support for them. When they saw the blind man, the disciples asked Jesus: ‘Who has sinned, he or his parents?’

They wanted to blame someone for what had happened. The answer of Jesus was clear: ‘Neither he nor his parents have sinned’.

This does not mean they have no sin at all! They are human beings like us, and we all have sinned (Romans 3:23). It means no specific sin was the reason for this man's blindness. We are not called upon to judge people. Anything can happen to any of us. We may be healthy now but can have an accident tomorrow and end up in a wheelchair. When we look at people with a disability, we should not ask whether they have sinned or not, because that question is wrong.

Jesus continued by saying: ‘The works of God should be made manifest in him’. In his life the works of God should become visible. What are those works? Jesus explained in verse 5: ‘I am the light of the world’. He is the One who brings light when there is darkness; and this literally came true in the blind man's life. Jesus gave him back the light in his eyes. The man was cured!

This does not always happen, and ‘light’ may be something else too; something that brings real change and gives hope to people. When it happens, people praise God.

3. Discuss

- a. When the disciples saw the man, they saw only his blindness. Jesus saw the man and felt compassion. How do you ‘see’ someone with a disability?
- b. Why are people with disabilities, like the man in the story, left aside and are – even now – sometimes forced to beg?
- c. Seeing with compassion is not judging someone but seeing with love and willingness to help! When you think about people with disabilities in your neighborhood, how are they looked upon? What difference would it make if we look at them like Jesus did?
- d. Why is the question ‘Who has sinned?’ wrong?
- e. What is the right question to ask when you meet people with disabilities?
- f. Why is it difficult to get involved with people with disabilities? How can we help each other to get involved and share light in the lives of the people around us?

Pray together for all those who think they are punished or cursed because they struggle a disability!

Bible study

'Friendship'

1. Getting started

Friendship is one of the most important relationships in human life. We all need friends. But sometimes people do not have any friends.

1. Why is life difficult when we have no friends at all?
2. What are the reasons why people may have no friends?

2. Scripture Reading: Read John 15: 9-17

To understand the bonds of friendship between different kinds of people, it is interesting to note the difference between Jesus and his disciples. Jesus was the Son of God, the powerful Messiah. He could heal the sick, and even raise people from the dead. One day He was in a heavy storm on the Sea of Galilee. All His disciples were afraid to die, but when He spoke the waves became still and the storm became calm. The disciples were astonished: Who is HE that even the waves obey him? And – what an amazing thing it was – that Jesus chose them for his friends!

They were ordinary fishermen and labourers, yet He chose them. They became his disciples, learning from Him, yet He called them friends. As their friend, He told them about His Father in Heaven. He shared the knowledge of God with them. Sharing what is most important to you is something you do with friends. Jesus asked them to love one another. Love is the only thing that keeps friends close. Love means you are not using someone but enjoying their company.

Jesus loved his disciples till the end. He asked them to go out and bear fruit, meaning they must go out and make friends with the people around them, sharing their faith with them, and opening their hearts to one another. Friendship comes at a price because it could also result in hurt and rejection. Even Jesus experienced that; he was betrayed by one of his disciples. But when you follow Jesus' example you will be loved too.

3. Discuss

- a. What makes it difficult to make friends with someone who is very different from you? What do we learn from Jesus?
- b. What does it mean to be friends? Read the following verses from the Bible and summarise what it says about friendship. Try to make your own definition of friendship.

Job 6: 14	Ecclesiasticus 4: 9
Proverbs 17: 9	Ecclesiasticus 4:10
Proverbs 17: 17	Ecclesiasticus 4: 12
Proverbs 27:10	Psalms 133: 1

- c. A beautiful example of friendship is the friendship between David and Jonathan, the son of King Saul, in 1 Samuel 18:

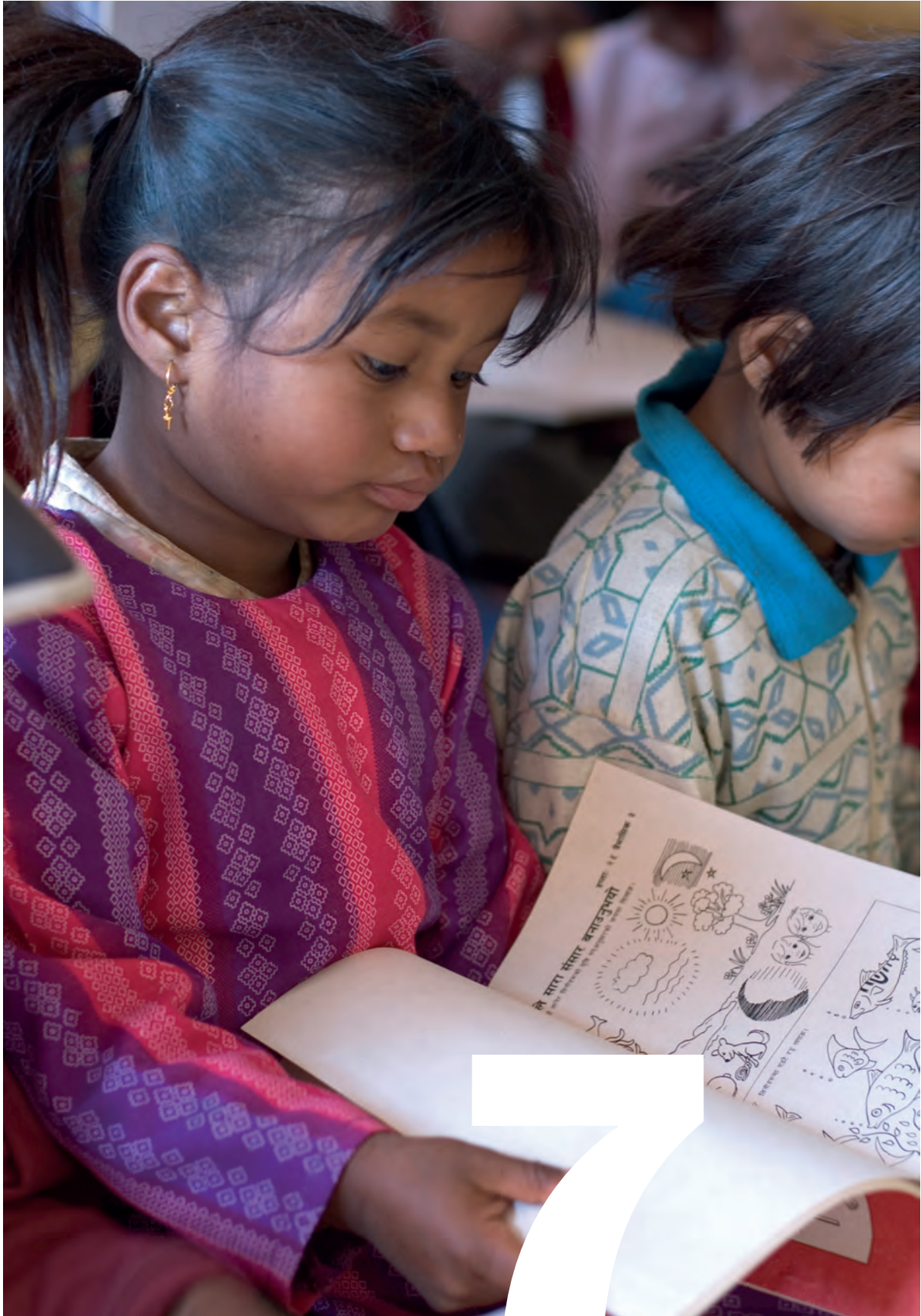
1. After David had finished talking with Saul, Jonathan became one in spirit with David, and he loved him as himself...
2. And Jonathan made a covenant with David because he loved him as himself.
3. Jonathan took off the robe he was wearing and gave it to David, along with his tunic, and even his sword, his bow and his belt.

When David would be king, Jonathan would not! What do you learn from this story?

- d. 'Friendship is the biggest gift we can give'. Do you agree? What does friendship mean to you?
- e. Jesus talked about his Father to his friends. Where do we talk about and do we talk about our faith, or should this be more than we really do? How can we do this?

- f. We started by discussing why some people do not have friends and how difficult that is. Do you know someone, maybe with severe disability, who needs a friend? Should you be the one? Is it possible as a Bible study group to invite this person and make sure she/he feels at home?

Pray together for real friendship in your own life and pray for a heart that can give friendship to those who need it.



Sundayschool lessons

Sundayschool: 'Bartimaeus'

Mark 10: 46-52

Questions to ask children after listening to the story of Bartimaeus in Mark 10.

1. What do you learn from this story?
2. What do you notice about the way the people were treating Bartimaeus?
3. Why do you think they were treating Bartimaeus in this way?
4. Are there blind people in our church? How are they treated?
5. What other disabilities do children know about? Do we have people with such disabilities in our church as well?

Assignment

Blindfold the children and have them all follow the Sundayschool teacher's voice – giving clear instructions – around a designated area. Eventually the blindfolded children should end up at the STOPPING area!

Discuss how hard it is to follow instructions while blindfolded. Then remove the blindfolds and have children follow the teacher to the STARTING point and discuss how easy it was to FOLLOW without the blindfolds.

Sundayschool story: An open roof

Mark 2

It is very important to help children to see what the impact is of having a (severe) disability. Sometimes children have family members with a disability or do know people around them. Probably everyone knows people with disabilities. During this class we want to discover Jesus' teaching on living with a disability.

Teacher:

1. What are your own experiences with people with disabilities. Do you feel uncertain when you meet someone with a disability?
2. What do you think people with disabilities feel when they meet people who are not connecting with them?
3. Be sure about the children in your class: are their kids with a disability or with disabled siblings? If there are, make sure their feelings are respected, and they will be – if possible – recognized and mentioned in your class.

Bible verses: Mark 2

1 A few days later, when Jesus again entered Capernaum, the people heard that he had come home. 2 They gathered in such large numbers that there was no room left, not even outside the door, and he preached the word to them. 3 Some men came, bringing to him a paralyzed man, carried by four of them. 4 Since they could not get him to Jesus because of the crowd, they made an opening in the roof above Jesus by digging through it and then lowered the mat the man was lying on. 5 When Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralyzed man, "Son, your sins are forgiven." 6 Now some teachers of the law were sitting there, thinking to themselves, 7 "Why does this fellow talk like that? He's blaspheming! Who can forgive sins but God alone?" 8 Immediately Jesus knew in his spirit that this was what they were thinking in their hearts, and he said to them, "Why are you thinking these things? 9 Which is easier: to say to this paralyzed man, 'Your sins are forgiven,' or to say, 'Get up, take your mat and walk'? 10 But I want you to know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins." So, he said to the man, 11 "I tell you, get up, take your mat and go home." 12 He got up, took his mat and walked out in full view of them all. This amazed everyone and they praised God, saying, "We have never seen anything like this!"

The Lesson

Intro

After singing and praying together, you may start with a small game. Talk about the meaning of being paralysed. Let the children pretend their arms and legs are lame. Let them imagine they are not able to walk and do something with their hands. Ask them what they would feel. Or ask one of the children to act paralysed and remain lying on the floor and ask some other child to help him/her to put on his/her jacket or some item of clothing. If what it means to be paralysed becomes clear, tell the story of the man in Mark 2.

The story

In the small city of Capernaum lives a paralyzed man. He is unable to walk, and he must stay on his bed all the time. Maybe he is like this from the time of his birth. Just imagine being on bed your whole life! Or maybe it is because of an illness or an accident. Terrible, you were able to

walk and suddenly something happened and now you are on your bed! People in the village are thinking: He must have done something wrong! God has punished him, or maybe his parents had done something bad and are punished! And this poor man, is thinking like that too: Have I done something to deserve this?

Most of the time he is alone. Many people with a disability don't have friends! [Question: do you have a friend with a disability?] This man, luckily, has four good friends. And they have heard about Jesus and want to bring their friend to him. They believe that Jesus can heal him! So, they pick him up, lying on his mattress and they carry him to Jesus! When they come closer, they see a big crowd before the door. No one is willing to let them pass. Should they give up? No, they are real friends, they never give up. They go upstairs on the roof. They listen carefully where Jesus is, and then they take away the tiles of the roof. They make it big enough to let their friend lying on his mattress through. And with all their power they lower him down before Jesus' feet.

Jesus looks at him and he looks straight into his heart, he knows about the many unanswered questions. He knows about the fear of having sinned. He doesn't say that he has sinned or his parents, no, this has not caused the pain and illness! But and this is also true, we are all sinners in the eyes of God. And looking at him he says: Son, your sins are forgiven! So, whatever is worrying you, worry no more! And when he hears this, peace comes into his heart!

Others, especially the people who knew their Bible, think: This is impossible, only God can forgive sins! They are not happy for the man. Jesus knows this too, and he says: It sounds impossible, but to say 'get up and walk' is even more impossible! Then he turned to the man and says: Son, take your mattress with you and go home! And immediately he feels his legs becoming strong, he feels the power in his muscles, and he jumps up! What a miracle. Everyone is shouting and praising God.

Application

What an amazing story: the man who was paralyzed was healed. So sometimes people who are ill are healed. It is a sign that God is all-powerful. But like in the story we all need healing at the inside: forgiveness of our sin. We may not all get healed when we have a disability or something else, we all can receive this forgiveness through Jesus Christ. And he promises us, when he comes again, we all will be healed as well. This story proves it: He has the power!

Questions (level 1)

1. What was the problem of the man on the bed?
2. What did his friends do?
3. What did Jesus give him?
4. How did Jesus prove he had the power to forgive?

Activity (level 1)

Give a colouring page to the smaller children (see below)

Questions (level 2)

1. What do we think when someone is ill or has a disability? Do we think they have done something wrong?
2. Do you think this is a punishment?
3. The friends of this man didn't talk about sins, they helped him! What should we do? Can you give an example of what you can do for someone with a disability?
4. Do we all have sins? What are sins? What is forgiveness?

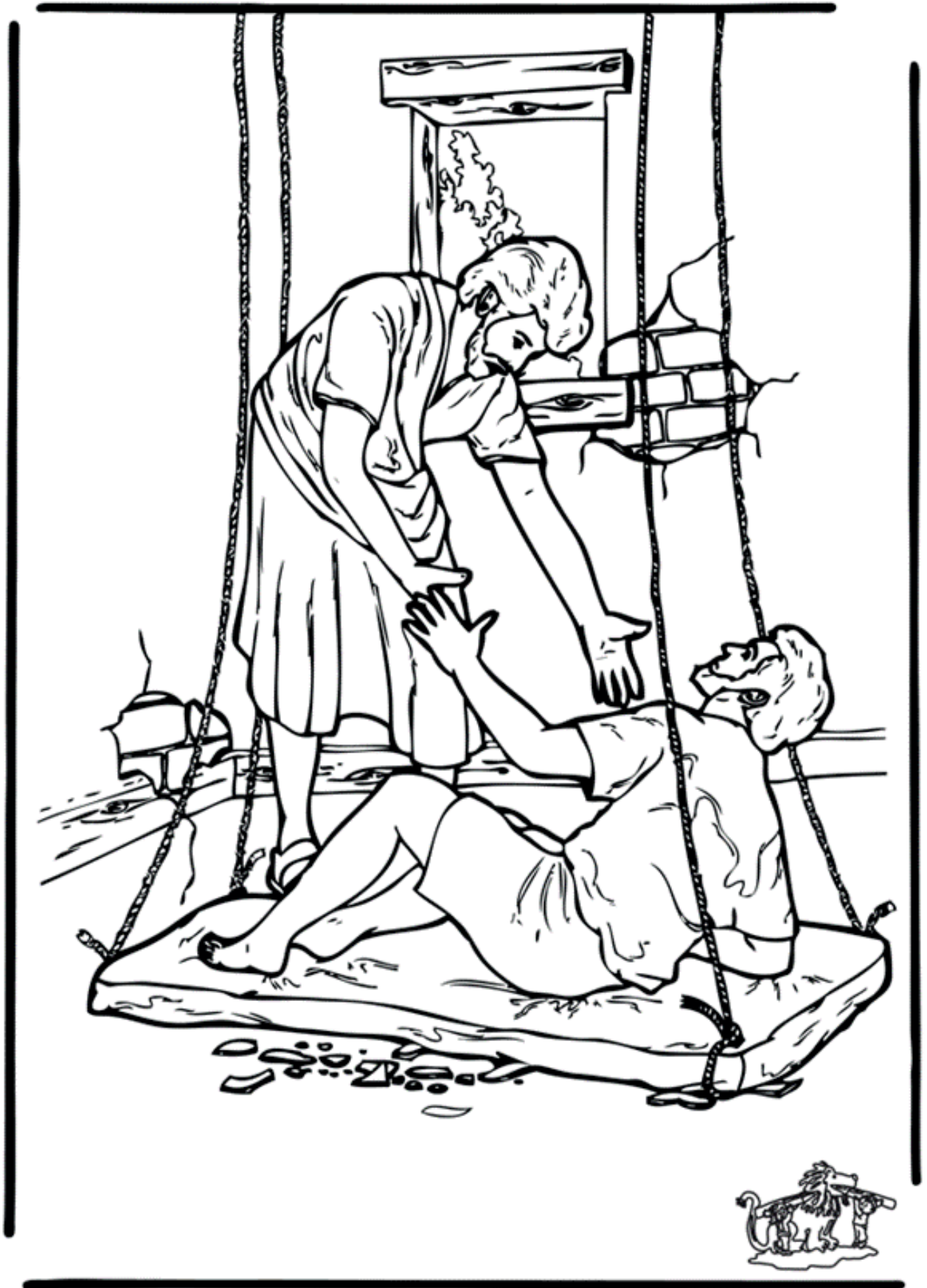
5. The people praised God at the end of the story. What reasons do we have to glorify God?

Activity (level 2)

Let children make a biblical drama of the story. One child can play the paralyzed man, four others his friend. Others play the crowd at the door. Let them play the story till they come to the door and are unable to enter.

Discuss

What difficulties are there for people with a disability and how can they be helped? How can we open the roof for them?



Sundayschool story:

The son of Jonathan (2 Samuel 9)

The story of Mephibosheth in 2 Samuel is a short story. However, it is a story which we so easily can find in our own lives. It is about reality and at the same time a story of love and a reflection of God's love. David's promise to Jonathan's son is like how God's grace is to us. David the King is taking care of an outcast, a disabled person and invites him to live as a son of David himself in his palace. We are like Mephibosheth: we are hiding; we are weak; we may feel incapable; and fearful before God the King who comes to us and uplifts us.

The story of King David and Mephibosheth brings to life for children the concepts of mercy, forgiveness and unconditional love. David showed mercy when other kings would have wanted to kill Mephibosheth because he was an heir to the prior king. It is also an important Old Testament illustration of the love of Christ for sinners.

Teacher

1. It was for Mephibosheth almost impossible to believe that David the new king of Israel was taking care of him. What do you think could have been the reason?
2. Make sure what you want the children to learn from the story! How do those lessons apply to your own life?
3. Do the children know some people like Mephibosheth? What can they tell about them? Do they know children who are having difficulty walking? Do they play with them or maybe even help them?

Bible verses: 2 Samuel 9

9 And David said, "Is there still anyone left of the house of Saul, that I may show him kindness for Jonathan's sake?" 2 Now there was a servant of the house of Saul whose name was Ziba, and they called him to David. And the king said to him, "Are you Ziba?" And he said, "I am your servant." 3 And the king said, "Is there not still someone of the house of Saul, that I may show the kindness of God to him?" Ziba said to the king, "There is still a son of Jonathan; he is crippled in his feet." 4 The king said to him, "Where is he?" And Ziba said to the king, "He is in the house of Machir the son of Ammiel, at Lo-debar." 5 Then King David sent and brought him from the house of Machir the son of Ammiel, at Lo-debar. 6 And Mephibosheth the son of Jonathan, son of Saul, came to David and fell on his face and paid homage. And David said, "Mephibosheth!" And he answered, "Behold, I am your servant." 7 And David said to him, "Do not fear, for I will show you kindness for the sake of your father Jonathan, and I will restore to you all the land of Saul your father, and you shall eat at my table always." 8 And he paid homage and said, "What is your servant, that you should show regard for a dead dog such as I?" 9 Then the king called Ziba, Saul's servant, and said to him, "All that belonged to Saul and to all his house I have given to your master's grandson. 10 And you and your sons and your servants shall till the land for him and shall bring in the produce, that your master's grandson may have bread to eat. But Mephibosheth your master's grandson shall always eat at my table." Now Ziba had fifteen sons and twenty servants. 11 Then Ziba said to the king, "According to all that my lord the king commands his servant, so will your servant do." So Mephibosheth ate at David's table, like one of the king's sons. 12 And Mephibosheth had a young son, whose name was Mica. And all who lived in Ziba's house became Mephibosheth's servants. 13 So Mephibosheth lived in Jerusalem, for he ate always at the king's table. Now he was lame in both his feet.

The Lesson

Introduction

Start the session by singing a song preferably one that refers to king David.

You may start with this activity:

What would you do if you were king or president? Think about all sorts of things that you may wish to do. You can for instance start by saying that you want to eat the whole day ice-cream. Make it nice and fun!

The story

One day David heard some very sad news. King Saul and his son had died in a battle. Jonathan had been the best friend of David; they were like brothers and shared everything. Because of the death of king Saul, it was now time for David to be the next king. That was something God had told Samuel- the old prophet – to anoint David as king long before he became the new king. It became finally a happy time for David after all the years that king Saul was trying to kill him.

During the years that David was king, God protected him from his enemies. God promised David that He would be with him forever. David was a great king, and the Israelites loved him. However, he was not perfect, as no one except Jesus was perfect. Still the people loved him and most what he did was good for the people of Israel.

One day David was thinking about his friend Jonathan, and he remembered his promise to Jonathan. Long ago David had promised to take care of the family of Jonathan if he would die. David asked people in the palace if they knew about anyone who was still alive of the family of Jonathan. They found out that a son of Jonathan with the name Mephibosheth was still alive. Mephibosheth had fallen when he was a small boy, and his legs were paralyzed. Therefore he walked with crutches. David wanted to meet Mephibosheth and he asked his servants to bring him in the palace. When he was brought into the palace, he didn't know why the king was looking for him and he was a bit afraid. David however not to be afraid. Maybe David told him about his best friend Jonathan who was the father of Mephibosheth. Maybe he told him about the adventures when they were walking in the fields. Maybe he told Mephibosheth about king Saul his grandfather who loved to listen to David when he was making music on his harp. King David invited Mephibosheth and his son Mica to come and live with him in the palace. Mephibosheth got also the land from his grandfather Saul back. David kept his promise to Jonathan, his best friend!

Application of the story

In this story David is finally crowned king. When you talk about this you could help children to understand that it is good and important to pray for kings, for presidents and other people who are in power. Pray for them that they are like David; showing mercy to others; to those who are weak; those who live on the fringes of society etc. David was doing the right thing, and he obeyed God.

Questions (level 1)

1. What happened to David?
2. What happened to Jonathan?
3. What happened to Mephibosheth?

Activities (level 1)

Use paper to cut out a crown shape. Let the children use crayons or markers to decorate the

crown. Staple or tape the crown shape into a circle that fits the child's head.

This Large Jigsaw Puzzle (see below) will help children learn this story and the example of mercy that King David showed.

Questions (level 2)

1. Why did nobody expect David to take care of Mephibosheth?
2. What should leaders learn from the example of King David? [You could discuss what makes a good leader e.g. honor, trustworthiness, serving others, following God.]
3. Another important aspect of the story is to understand that David made a promise to Jonathan his best friend and that he kept that promise to take care of the family of Jonathan. Why is it important to keep your promises?

Activity (level 2)

Play the story, let someone be King David, Jonathan his friend, Mephibosheth (as a child) and as a grown-up man. Let them imagine and show what the people in the story felt!

- Scene 1: play David's promise to Jonathan
- Scene 2: Play out the accident that happened with Mephibosheth
- Scene 3: Play how Mephibosheth receives the message to come to the palace
- Scene 4: Play how he is welcomed by David and accepted in his house

David Was Called as King Jigsaw Puzzle

Cut the puzzle apart on the red lines, mix the pieces up, and put the picture back together.



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Sundayschool story: Moses' Calling (Exodus 3 and 4)

It is very important to help children discover that people with a disability are also called by God to serve Him. In the church we are all disciples of Christ, no matter what our capabilities are. It is amazing to see what God has done through Moses although this was a man who struggled with his own disabilities!

Teacher

1. Reflect a while on this question: Do you think people with (severe) disabilities can be called to serve God in the church? For example, in a leadership position or as a preacher? Why do you think this way?
2. Do you know someone with a disability who can be an important example to others? How is God speaking through his/her life to the people around him/her?
3. Why is it relevant for children to know this? Do they sometimes question their own capabilities and think they may not be good enough for God?

Bible verses: Exodus 3 and 4

Exodus 3: 1-7

1. Now Moses was tending the flock of Jethro his father-in-law, the priest of Midian, and he led the flock to the far side of the wilderness and came to Horeb, the mountain of God.
2. There the angel of the LORD appeared to him in flames of fire from within a bush. Moses saw that though the bush was on fire it did not burn up.
3. So Moses thought, "I will go over and see this strange sight – why the bush does not burn up."
4. When the LORD saw that he had gone over to look, God called to him from within the bush, "Moses! Moses!" And Moses said, "Here I am."
5. "Do not come any closer," God said. "Take off your sandals, for the place where you are standing is holy ground."
6. Then He said, "I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob." At this, Moses hid his face, because he was afraid to look at God.
7. The LORD said, "I have indeed seen the misery of my people in Egypt. I have heard them crying out because of their slave drivers, and I am concerned about their suffering."

Exodus 3: 13-15

13. Moses said to God, "Suppose I go to the Israelites and say to them, 'The God of your fathers has sent me to you,' and they ask me, 'What is his name?' Then what shall I tell them?"
14. God said to Moses, "I AM WHO I AM. This is what you are to say to the Israelites: 'I AM has sent me to you.'"
15. God also said to Moses, "Say to the Israelites, 'The LORD, the God of your fathers – the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob – has sent me to you.' 'This is my name forever, the name you shall call me from generation to generation.'"

Exodus 4: 10-15

10. Moses said to the LORD, "Pardon your servant, Lord. I have never been eloquent, neither in the past nor since you have spoken to your servant. I am slow of speech and tongue."

11. The LORD said to him, "Who gave human beings their mouths? Who makes them deaf or mute? Who gives them sight or makes them blind? Is it not I, the LORD?"
12. Now go; I will help you speak and will teach you what to say."
13. But Moses said, "Pardon your servant, Lord. Please send someone else."
14. Then the LORD's anger burned against Moses, and He said, "What about your brother, Aaron the Levite? I know he can speak well. He is already on his way to meet you, and he will be glad to see you.
15. You shall speak to him and put words in his mouth; I will help both of you speak and will teach you what to do."

The Lesson

Introduction

After singing and praying together, you may start with a small game. Tell your pupils to imagine there is a presidential election. Let two of your pupils tell the group why he or she should be chosen. Give them both a few minutes to talk to the group. After this ask two questions:

1. What seems to be most important to get chosen by the people?
2. If this is true, will people with a disability ever be chosen in important positions?

Now let us look at the Bible and discover how God is looking at this. Tell them the story of Moses.

The story

Long ago the people of Israel were living in Egypt. They were not treated well. The king of Egypt, the Pharaoh, made them slaves! They had to work hard and forced to build cities for the Pharaoh. When he saw that there were so many, he ordered his soldiers to kill all the newborn boys!

In that terrible time Moses was born. His parents tried to hide him, but at the end they made a basket and put Moses into it. They let it flow on the river. The daughter of the Pharaoh found him, and he grew up in the palace! But when he became a young man, he wanted to help his own people! He even killed an Egyptian soldier. After that he fled to the desert and started working as a shepherd.

Now, today, he walks with his sheep close to a mountain. Suddenly he sees a small bushfire, but the bush is not burning down. Curious he comes closer, and then a voice is heard, saying: Moses, take off your shoes, this place is holy! God speaks to him! What a miracle. Why is God coming to him?

God has heard his people crying in Egypt. He has seen what was done to them by the Pharaoh and his soldiers. He wants to send Moses to deliver them from Egypt. He was not forgetting them; He was still remembering his promises to Abraham. And Moses, who wanted to deliver his people, the man who killed a soldier? He is doubting, he is not eager to do it! First, he says: If I go, who can I tell them that has sent me? What is your Name? And God gives him an answer: 'I am who I am' has sent you. This means, I am the God who keeps his promises, and I am going to bring My people home.

Then Moses says: 'I cannot speak'. I do not know what speech problem Moses has. He anyway feels unable to take this calling from God. If you cannot speak well, how can you lead a nation? How can you convince the Pharaoh to let your people go? So, please send someone else!

God answers in a strong way: I am the Creator of the mouth, I made everyone, also the people who can't hear or can't speak! I created you, and like everyone else you can serve Me. But still God listens to Moses and gives him his brother to support him.

Application

We are all created by God, we can all serve Him as we are. We serve Him with what we have received, whatever our gifts may be. Nobody is excluded from serving God and following Jesus. But sometimes we need support, God will provide this through others. It is good to support others, and it is good to get some support from others. We should never be ashamed to accept support and never refuse to support others. It is no shame – even Moses got help.

Questions (level 1)

1. What happened to the people of Israel in Egypt?
2. What happened to Moses in the desert?
3. What was he called to do?
4. Why was he not sure?
5. How did God help him?

Activity (level 1)

Give a coloring page to the smaller children.

Questions (level 2)

1. What do we learn from this story? What about when we look back at the election game played at the beginning of this lesson?
2. Sometimes we all need help. Do you ask for help when you cannot do something for yourself? Why (not)?
3. How do you sometimes give support to others?
4. How is God helping us?

Activity (level 2)

Everyone can serve God. Let us imagine we cannot talk. Let your pupils take a short time to prepare. Let them convey something to the others without using words at all!

- Let some explain that God created everything and everybody.
- Others may convey that God loves us all.

Discuss

What help could we give people in the church who cannot hear?





There the angel of the Lord appeared to him in a blazing fire from the middle of a bush. Exodus 3:2

Sundayschool story:

Naman healed of Leprosy (2 Kings 5)

Teacher

This story about Naaman is a story in which Christians see the power of God to heal people from diseases. On the other hand, the story of Gehazi who is punished with leprosy may be a reason for Christians to believe that God punishes people with disease and its consequences like, for instance, disability. Make sure that you give the right answers when children ask if God punishes people with diseases or disability.

Also make sure you know what leprosy is. Children will ask you what kind of disease it is. Try to explain this in simple ways (go to the section of this toolkit in which a number of disabilities are explained). Leprosy is a disease caused by bacteria that are spread through aerosol. If untreated, it may lead to serious disabilities. The diagnosis of leprosy may be a reason for exclusion and stigma even today.

Bible verses: 2 Kings 5

1 Now Naaman was commander of the army of the king of Aram. He was a great man in the sight of his master and highly regarded, because through him the LORD had given victory to Aram. He was a valiant soldier, but he had leprosy.
2 Now bands of raiders from Aram had gone out and had taken captive a young girl from Israel, and she served Naaman's wife. 3 She said to her mistress, "If only my master would see the prophet who is in Samaria! He would cure him of his leprosy."
4 Naaman went to his master and told him what the girl from Israel had said. 5 "By all means, go," the king of Aram replied. "I will send a letter to the king of Israel." So Naaman left, taking with him ten talents of silver, six thousand shekels of gold and ten sets of clothing. 6 The letter that he took to the king of Israel read: "With this letter I am sending my servant Naaman to you so that you may cure him of his leprosy."
7 As soon as the king of Israel read the letter, he tore his robes and said, "Am I God? Can I kill and bring back to life? Why does this fellow send someone to me to be cured of his leprosy? See how he is trying to pick a quarrel with me!"
8 When Elisha the man of God heard that the king of Israel had torn his robes, he sent him this message: "Why have you torn your robes? Have the man come to me and he will know that there is a prophet in Israel." 9 So Naaman went with his horses and chariots and stopped at the door of Elisha's house. 10 Elisha sent a messenger to say to him, "Go, wash yourself seven times in the Jordan, and your flesh will be restored and you will be cleansed."
11 But Naaman went away angry and said, "I thought that he would surely come out to me and stand and call on the name of the LORD his God, wave his hand over the spot and cure me of my leprosy. 12 Are not Abana and Pharpar, the rivers of Damascus, better than all the waters of Israel? Couldn't I wash in them and be cleansed?" So, he turned and went off in a rage.
13 Naaman's servants went to him and said, "My father, if the prophet had told you to do some great thing, would you not have done it? How much more, then, when he tells you, 'Wash and be cleansed!'" 14 So he went down and dipped himself in the Jordan seven times, as the man of God had told him, and his flesh was restored and became clean like that of a young boy.
15 Then Naaman and all his attendants went back to the man of God. He stood before him and said, "Now I know that there is no God in all the world except in Israel. So

please accept a gift from your servant.”

16 The prophet answered, “As surely as the LORD lives, whom I serve, I will not accept a thing.” And even though Naaman urged him, he refused.

17 “If you will not,” said Naaman, “please let me, your servant, be given as much earth as a pair of mules can carry, for your servant will never again make burnt offerings and sacrifices to any other god but the LORD. 18 But may the LORD forgive your servant for this one thing: When my master enters the temple of Rimmon to bow down and he is leaning on my arm and I have to bow there also – when I bow down in the temple of Rimmon, may the LORD forgive your servant for this.”

19 “Go in peace,” Elisha said.

After Naaman had travelled some distance, 20 Gehazi, the servant of Elisha the man of God, said to himself, “My master was too easy on Naaman, this Aramean, by not accepting from him what he brought. As surely as the LORD lives, I will run after him and get something from him.”

21 So Gehazi hurried after Naaman. When Naaman saw him running toward him, he got down from the chariot to meet him. “Is everything all right?” he asked.

22 “Everything is all right,” Gehazi answered. “My master sent me to say, ‘Two young men from the company of the prophets have just come to me from the hill country of Ephraim. Please give them a talent of silver and two sets of clothing.’”

23 “By all means, take two talents,” said Naaman. He urged Gehazi to accept them, and then tied up the two talents of silver in two bags, with two sets of clothing. He gave them to two of his servants, and they carried them ahead of Gehazi. 24 When Gehazi came to the hill, he took the things from the servants and put them away in the house. He sent the men away and they left.

25 When he went in and stood before his master, Elisha asked him, “Where have you been, Gehazi?”

“Your servant didn’t go anywhere,” Gehazi answered.

26 But Elisha said to him, “Was not my spirit with you when the man got down from his chariot to meet you? Is this the time to take money or to accept clothes – or olive groves and vineyards, or flocks and herds, or male and female slaves? 27 Naaman’s leprosy will cling to you and to your descendants forever.” Then Gehazi went from Elisha’s presence and his skin was leprous – it had become as white as snow.

The Lesson

Introduction

Ask children if they know what leprosy is and if they know people who have leprosy. If there is no response, it would be useful to explain what leprosy is so that children understand that it is a disease which is still among us, certainly in India and Nepal. Later on you may give more details about the disabling effects of leprosy, i.e., loss of sensation, deformed limbs, loss of eyesight and, above all, it is (still) a very stigmatising condition because people in general fear getting infection and leprosy themselves.

The story

Naaman was the commander of the whole army of the country of Aram. He was very rich and had many servants. Even his wife had a servant girl. She was a little girl from the country of Israel who had been captured from her home and brought to the country of Aram to be a slave in Naaman’s house. Naaman and his family did not believe in God, but the little girl did. Even though she was far away from her parents and Israel, she remembered what her parents had taught her when she was very little. She remembered Elisha, the prophet, and all the good things he did for God.

Even though Naaman was a commander of the army and very rich, he had a big problem. He had a terrible disease called leprosy. Leprosy starts out as white spots on the skin. Then, the white spots start becoming very sore. If the leprosy spots were on a person's hands, then the hands could become so sore with leprosy that they could fall off. The spots would spread all over the body and finally lead to death. It was a horrible thing to have leprosy because no medicine could make it better.

No one wanted to be around someone with leprosy because they might get leprosy too. Naaman had to stay away from everyone. He could not be a soldier anymore, and he could not be with his family. Everyone was sad about Naaman.

No one in the whole country of Aram knew how to help Naaman except the servant girl from Israel. She told her mistress, Naaman's wife, about her God and Elisha the prophet. Elisha could do miracles because Elisha was a prophet of God. Maybe Naaman could go to Israel and see Elisha.

When Naaman's wife told him about Elisha, he became very excited. He decided to go to Israel and find out if the girl's words were true. Naaman and his servants had to ride very far to get to Israel. They went to King Joram's house and then to Elisha's house.

When he got to Elisha's house, Naaman sat outside and waited. Naaman was very important, so he expected Elisha to come outside and give him a special greeting. Naaman waited, but Elisha did not come outside. Instead, a servant came outside and told Naaman that Elisha had a message for him, "Elisha said that you should go and dip in the Jordan River seven times. If you do this, then the Lord will take away your leprosy, and you will be well."

Naaman was very angry. Didn't Elisha know that he was an important army commander? How dare Elisha tell him to go and wash in the dirty Jordan River! If he wanted to wash in a river, then he could have done that back in the country of Aram. Naaman was so angry that he started to head for home.

"Please, sir," said Naaman's servants, "we really want you to be well again. You will die if the leprosy does not go away. It would be an easy thing to wash in the Jordan River seven times. We have come such a long way. Why don't you try it?"

Naaman also wanted his leprosy to disappear, so he washed at the Jordan River. Then he washed again. He did this seven times, just as Elisha had said. Naaman came up out of the water and looked at his skin. The leprosy spots were gone! His skin looked perfect! It was as soft and smooth as a little child's skin.

Naaman went straight back to Elisha's house. Naaman wanted to give Elisha all the money, gold and silver and beautiful fabrics he had brought from Aram. But Elisha would not accept the gifts. He had not done this for money. He told Naaman how to be healed because he wanted Naaman to know that God was real.

"Elisha, since I have been healed of my leprosy, I know that the God of Israel is real. My wife's servant girl was right. From now on, I will worship the Lord," Naaman promised. Naaman left and began his journey back to Aram.

Elisha's servant, Gehazi, was not happy. He thought Elisha should have accepted all of the gifts.

Gehazi did not tell Elisha, but he followed Naaman and told him a lie. Gehazi told Naaman that Elisha had changed his mind, and now Elisha wanted the gifts. Naaman was happy to give Gehazi the gifts, and then he continued on his journey.

Elisha was very angry with Gehazi for the way he had tricked Naaman. He told Gehazi that now he would have the leprosy that Naaman had had. Gehazi looked down at his skin and saw that he did have leprosy. Gehazi knew that he had made a big mistake.

Application of the story

God allowed a Jewish girl to be taken as a slave by the Syrian army commander, Naaman. While most people would be unhappy and maybe angry at being in this position, the young slave girl cared for her master and strongly advised him to go to Israel, and meet the prophet of God. She knew that God could do the impossible and heal Naaman. For us it means that we should serve and trust God wherever we are, in whatever circumstances we are.

Naaman initially left the home of Elisha filled with anger because Elisha did not meet him in person or perform a grand ceremony to cure him. He was also angry at Elisha's direction that he had to wash himself in a dirty river, the Jordan, when there were larger and cleaner rivers in Syria.

Naaman was a proud man, but God wanted to help him not only to get cured from leprosy but also to become humble and realise that God is compassionate and by far the most powerful. After Naaman submitted in faith and obedience, God miraculously cured his leprosy. Naaman responded with praise and humility before God after being restored. God also expects us to walk in faith and obedience.

Questions (level 1)

1. What disease did Naaman have?
2. Who was the servant girl? Who did she worship?
3. What message did Elisha's servant give Naaman?
4. Why did Naaman not like Elisha's directions for him to dip in the Jordan River seven times to be made clean?
5. What happened when Naaman dipped in the Jordan River seven times?
6. Elisha did not accept Naaman's gift. What did his servant, Gehazi, do? What happened to him?
7. What does this story tell you about God?

Activity (level 1)

Colouring a picture (see below for two examples).

Questions (level 2)

1. What is something you wonder about in this story?
2. Why do you think the servant girl wanted her master to be healed, even though she had been taken from her home in Israel to be their slave? Would you have done the same?
3. How do you think Naaman's life changed after he was healed and started worshipping the God of Israel?
4. The servant girl obeyed and believed in God even though she was without her family. Is it difficult for you to obey God when you are alone?
5. Because of the servant girl, Naaman started worshipping and believing in God. Who can you talk to about God?

6. People may think leprosy is a punishment of God. What should we tell them? (Make sure the teaching is clear and includes:
- a. We are all sinners and deserve punishment, we all need forgiveness.
 - b. There is no special sin what causes a certain illness. In the Bible we find only a few exceptions, it is not the rule.

Activity: What is infection?

- All children stand in a circle with their eyes closed.
- The Sundayschool teacher touches one person on the head and this person is infected.
- The children should walk around the room and shake hands with as many other children as possible.
- The infected child should tap twice on another child's hand to pass on the infection.
- All infected children can tap twice on the hands of others to infect them.
- Stop the game and ask infected children to raise their hand.
- Repeat the game and reduce or increase the time to figure out roughly how long it takes before everyone is infected.

Tip

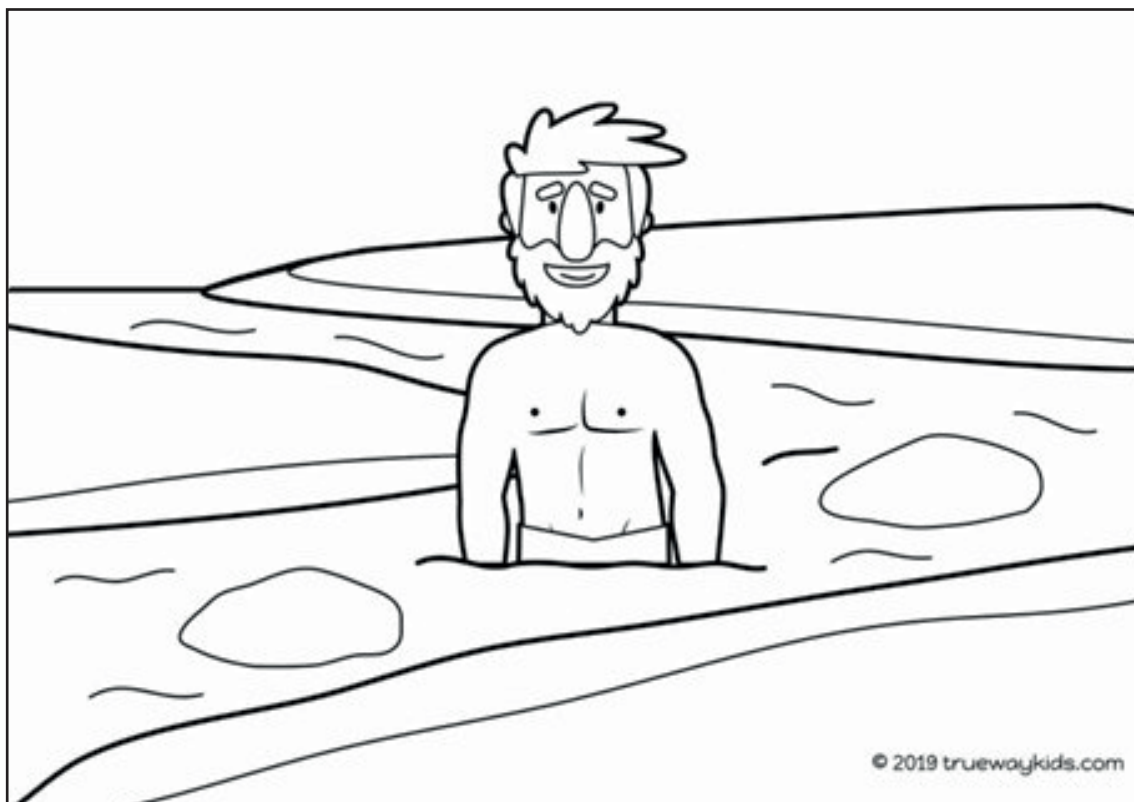
For an extra challenge, see if children can retrace their steps to figure out who started the game as the first child with infection.

Reflect and explain what an infectious disease is. Explain that leprosy is not such a common disease anymore and that it is not a very infectious disease; that it takes a very long time to get it and that you have to live with many people in a small house. Explain also that one cannot get leprosy from shaking hands, sharing food, hugging or kissing, but that it is spread through the air. Tell children not to be afraid of someone who has leprosy. Most people with leprosy get treatment and they are not sick any longer.

Activity

Show large, printed photographs of clean and dirty rivers. Ask children, which they think would be best to clean themselves. Share why it didn't make sense to Naaman that washing in a muddy river would make him clean. Give an example of a time you or others obeyed God even though it didn't really make sense at the time.





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