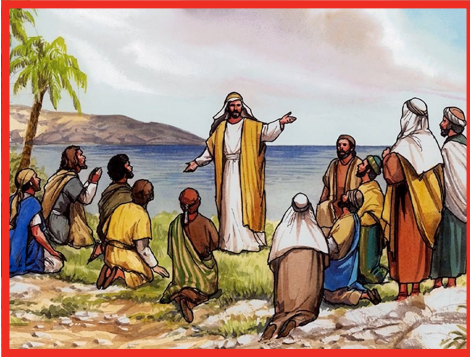


The Great Commission instructs us to go and preach the gospel to all nations, to all people.

-Matthew 28:19-20



Scripture on the Disabled

As he 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

Then the Lord said to him, "Who has made man's mouth? Who makes him mute, or deaf, or seeing, or blind? Is it not I, the Lord?"

-Exodus 4:11

But when you give a feast, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, and you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you. For you will be repaid at the resurrection of the just.

-Luke 14:13-14

About 7 million
(roughly 14 percent) of public school students ages 3 to 21 in the United States have some kind of disability, according to data from the Department of Education.

Autism, depression, anxiety, ADHD, and developmental delays often keep kids (and parents) away from church. A new study has found children with autism are almost twice as likely to never attend church or other religious services. Families of children with other disabilities are missing from the pews as well. These are the parents who grew up in the church. Whose fathers were preachers, elders, deacons and whose mothers were Sunday School teachers and Ladies Bible Class members. These parents of children with disabilities are aching for their child to know the same love of a church family as they did. I can vouch as this describes my family. Our oldest son has autism. For families like mine, it doesn't take a study to know that there are often barriers that prevent children with disabilities (and their families) from participating in worship. So what are the barriers and how can we, as the church not just accommodate but welcome? This brochure lists suggested methods for welcoming those thirsting to belong.

-Jennifer Allen
ACU Summit 2019



The Less Traveled Path to Christ



Families, Autism and the Church Today

by: Jennifer Allen



An understanding of God's design is a great place to start inclusion for any church body. Different may be frightening.

Common Signs of Autism

- Avoiding eye contact
- Delayed speech and communication skills
- Reliance on rules and routines
- Being upset by relatively minor changes
- Unexpected reactions to sounds, tastes, sights, touch and smells
- Difficulty understanding other people's emotions
- Focusing on or becoming obsessed by a narrow range of interests or objects
- Engaging in repetitive behavior such as flapping hands or rocking



"Upon learning that my son's brain was physically wired differently than that of a neurotypical truly fascinated me with God's design!"
-Jennifer Allen

Creating Sanctuary

Suggestions for the Church

1. Always ask what may help as every disability and circumstance is unique. By just asking and desiring to include the child into the group, you've already relieved the parent considerably!
2. Train staff, especially youth ministers on understanding and incorporating those with autism spectrum disorders and other disabilities. Add training materials/resources to your church library for members and staff.
3. Consider a buddy system for youth group. Oftentimes there are students that gravitate to helping those with disabilities. By assigning one person as a 'buddy', both young people win.
4. Consider sensory challenges: Fluorescent lights are often painful. Consider replacing with LEDs. Noise levels. While you cannot do anything about crying babies, know that the ASD child is not only distracted by the sudden loud cries, but oftentimes in pain so sitting a distance from the abrupt sounds (or allowing an out) is essential.
5. Assign a staff member or volunteer to be the church disabilities coordinator. Having a knowledgeable go-to person solves many issues!
6. Know the person with ASD is very literal and direct. This is how they are wired. They rarely understand innuendos or sarcasm.
7. Know this: socializing is difficult and oftentimes exhausting especially in a crowd. Body language can be different and eye contact may be difficult. Please don't think this is rude behavior.
8. Avoid physical contact unless they offer it first sometimes touch is painful.
9. Offer a quiet area to decompress. Maybe a 'gathering' room off the foyer?

Seeking Sanctuary

Suggestions for the Parent

1. Know the path of your child and the church is going to be different than the path you took in your youth. You probably know this and are hurting. Rest assured that God is close to you and you are not alone in your journey.
2. You will have to do things differently. You might be teaching God's word in a different manner than a Sunday school teacher, but they will learn it just the same through you.
3. Some youth groups are very inclusive to children with disabilities more now than ever! However, if you are new to a congregation and there is a 'clique' already formed, you may need to provide your own inclusive pew experience during service. Remember, consistency is key so find the area of the church that works for your child's needs.
4. If the Biblical stories of David and Goliath are not brought to life in Sunday school, it can be just as impactful by viewing a video series of the Bible at home! Remember, with autism, more is understood through visualization.
5. Take a moment to pray for those who might be non-inclusive or bullying your child. Pray that their eyes will be open to the value of all people, and that God will help to soften their heart.
6. Know that there is a special purpose for your child. God does not make mistakes and medical science is just now realizing that for every deficit the brain function incurs, there is a gift or an ability that is been given. That is the power of your child and God's design!
7. Volunteer at church to help with accommodations for your child and others. You might be the leader toward understanding and incorporating those with disabilities.