



Lausanne Committee for World Evangelization

The Whole Church taking the Whole Gospel to the Whole World

HIDDEN AND FORGOTTEN PEOPLE MINISTRY AMONG PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

Lausanne Occasional Paper No. 35 B

Produced by the Issue Group on this topic at the 2004 Forum

hosted by the

Lausanne Committee for World Evangelization

In Pattaya, Thailand, September 29 to October 5, 2004

"A New Vision, a New Heart, a Renewed Call"

In encouraging the publication and study of the Occasional Papers, the Lausanne Committee for World Evangelization does not necessarily endorse every viewpoint expressed in these papers.

Lausanne Committee for World Evangelization

info@lausanne.org

www.lausanne.org

Lausanne Occasional Paper (LOP) No. 35 B
This Issue Group on Ministry Among People with Disabilities was Issue Group No. 6 B
This was designed to challenge the church to minister among another *Hidden and
Forgotten People*. The LOP focussing on other Hidden people groups is LOP 35 A
(there were 31 Issue Groups at the Forum)

Series Editor for the 2004 Forum Occasional Papers (commencing with LOP 30):
David Claydon

This Occasional Paper was prepared by the whole Issue Group and
the principal writers were Joni Eareckson Tada and Jack S. Oppenhuizen

Copyright © 2005
Lausanne Committee for World Evangelization
and its National Committees around the world
<info@lausanne.org>

The context for the production of the Lausanne Occasional Papers

The Lausanne Movement is an international movement committed to energising

“the whole Church to take the whole gospel to the whole world”.

With roots going back to the historical conferences in Edinburgh (1910) and Berlin (1966), the Lausanne Movement was born out of the First International Congress on World Evangelization called by evangelist Billy Graham held in Lausanne, Switzerland, in July 1974. The landmark outcome of this Congress was the *Lausanne Covenant* supported by the 2430 participants from 150 nations. The covenant declares the substance of the Christian faith as historically declared in the creeds and adds a clear missional dimension to our faith. Many activities have emerged from the Lausanne Congress and from the second congress held in Manila in 1989. The Covenant (in a number of languages) and details about the many regional events and specialised conferences which have been undertaken in the name of Lausanne may be examined on the website at www.lausanne.org.

The continuing Lausanne International Committee believed it was led by the Holy Spirit to hold another conference which would bring together Christian leaders from around the world. This time the Committee planned to have younger emerging leaders involved and sought funds to enable it to bring a significant contingent from those parts of the world where the church is rapidly growing today. It decided to call the conference a **Forum**. As a Forum its structure would be to allow people to come and participate if they had something to contribute to one of 31 issues. These issues were chosen through a global research programme seeking to identify the most significant issues in the world today which are of concern in our task to take the *good news* to the world.

This Lausanne Occasional Paper (LOP) is the report which has emerged from one of these Issue Groups. LOPs have been produced for each of the Issue Groups and information re these and other publications may be obtained by going to the website at www.lausanne.org.

The theme of the Forum for World Evangelization held in 2004 was **“A new vision, a new heart and a renewed call”**. This Forum was held in Pattaya, Thailand from September 29 to October 5, 2004. 1530 participants came from 130 countries to work in one of the 31 Issue Groups.

The Affirmations at the conclusion of the Forum stated:

There has been a spirit of working together in serious dialogue and prayerful reflection. Representatives from a wide spectrum of cultures and virtually all parts of the world have come together to learn from one another and to seek new direction from the Holy Spirit for world evangelization. They committed themselves to joint action under divine guidance.

The dramatic change in the political and economic landscape in recent years has raised new challenges in evangelization for the church. The polarization between east and west makes it imperative that the church seek God’s direction for the appropriate responses to the present challenges.

In the 31 Issue Groups these new realities were taken into consideration, including the HIV pandemic, terrorism, globalization, the global role of media, poverty, persecution of Christians, fragmented families, political and religious nationalism, post-modern mind set, oppression of children, urbanization, neglect of the disabled and others.

Great progress was made in these groups as they grappled for solutions to the key challenges of world evangelization. As these groups focused on making specific recommendations, larger strategic themes came to the forefront.

There was affirmation that major efforts of the church must be directed toward those who have no access to the gospel. The commitment to help establish self sustaining churches within 6000 remaining unreached people groups remains a central priority.

Secondly, the words of our Lord call us to love our neighbour as ourselves. In this we have failed greatly. We renew our commitment to reach out in love and compassion to those who are marginalised because of disabilities or who have different lifestyles and spiritual perspectives. We commit to reach out to children and young people who constitute a majority of the world's population, many of whom are being abused, forced into slavery, armies and child labour.

A third stream of a strategic nature acknowledges that the growth of the church is now accelerating outside of the western world. Through the participants from Africa, Asia and Latin America, we recognise the dynamic nature and rapid growth of the church in the *South*. Church leaders from the *South* are increasingly providing exemplary leadership in world evangelization.

Fourthly, we acknowledge the reality that much of the world is made up of oral learners who understand best when information comes to them by means of stories. A large proportion of the world's populations are either unable to or unwilling to absorb information through written communications. Therefore, a need exists to share the "Good News" and to disciple new Christians in story form and parables.

Fifthly, we call on the church to use media to effectively engage the culture in ways that draw non believers toward spiritual truth and to proclaim Jesus Christ in culturally relevant ways.

Finally, we affirm the priesthood of all believers and call on the church to equip, encourage and empower women, men and youth to fulfil their calling as witnesses and co-labourers in the world wide task of evangelization.

Transformation was a theme which emerged from the working groups. We acknowledge our own need to be continually transformed, to continue to open ourselves to the leading of the Holy Spirit, to the challenges of God's word and to grow in Christ together with fellow Christians in ways that result in social and economic transformation. We acknowledge that the scope of the gospel and building the Kingdom of God involves, body, mind, soul and spirit. Therefore we call for increasing integration of service to society and proclamation of the gospel.

We pray for those around the world who are being persecuted for their faith and for those who live in constant fear of their lives. We uphold our brothers and sisters who are suffering. We recognize that the reality of the persecuted church needs to be increasingly on the agenda of the whole body of Christ. At the same time, we also acknowledge the importance of loving and doing good to our enemies while we fight for the right of freedom of conscience everywhere.

We are deeply moved by the onslaught of the HIV/AIDS pandemic – the greatest human emergency in history. The Lausanne movement calls all churches everywhere to prayer and holistic response to this plague.

"9/11", the war in Iraq, the war on terror and its reprisals compel us to state that we must not allow the gospel or the Christian faith to be captive to any one geo-political entity. We affirm that the Christian faith is above all political entities.

We are concerned and mourn the death and destruction caused by all conflicts, terrorism and war. We call for Christians to pray for peace, to be proactively involved in reconciliation and avoid all attempts to turn any conflict into a religious war. Christian mission in this context lies in becoming peace makers.

We pray for peace and reconciliation and God's guidance in how to bring about peace through our work of evangelization. We pray for God to work in the affairs of nations to open doors of opportunity for the gospel. We call on the church to mobilize every believer to focus specific consistent prayer for the evangelization of their communities and the world.

In this Forum we have experienced the partnership of men and women working together. We call on the church around the world to work towards full partnership of men and women in the work of world evangelism by maximising the gifts of all.

We also recognize the need for greater intentionality in developing future leaders. We call on the church to find creative ways to release emerging leaders to serve effectively.

Numerous practical recommendations for local churches to consider were offered. These will be available on the Lausanne website and in the Lausanne Occasional Papers. It is our prayer

that these many case studies and action plans will be used of God to mobilize the church to share a clear and relevant message using a variety of methods to reach the most neglected or resistant groups so that everyone will have the opportunity to hear the gospel message and be able to respond to this good news in faith.

We express our gratitude to the Thai Church which has hosted us and to their welcoming presentation to the Forum. We are profoundly gratefully to God for the privilege of being able to gather here from the four corners of the earth. We have developed new partnerships, made new friends and encouraged one another in our various ministries. Not withstanding the resistance to the gospel in many places and the richness of an inherited religious and cultural tradition we here at the Forum have accepted afresh the renewed call to be obedient to the mandate of Christ. We commit ourselves to making His saving love known so that the whole world may have opportunity to accept God's gift of salvation through Christ.

These affirmations indicate the response of the participants to the Forum outcomes and their longing that the whole church may be motivated by the outcomes of the Forum to strengthen its determination to be obedient to God's calling.

May the case studies and the practical suggestions in this and the other LOPs be of great help to you and your church as you seek to find new ways and a renewed call to proclaim the saving love of Jesus Christ

David Claydon

CONTENTS

- 1. Introduction**
 - (a) Leaders Represent 23 Countries in Disability Ministry
 - (b) Three Messages to the Church Worldwide
- 2. Who are “the disabled?”**
 - (a) Issues faced every day
 - (b) The Deaf Community
- 3. How does the world view people with disabilities?**
 - (a) Societal Response
 - (b) Other Religious and Social Systems
 - (c) Taboos and social stigma
- 4. How does God view people with disabilities?**
 - (a) Theological Understanding
 - (b) Divine Healing
 - (c) Should Disabled People Seek Healing?
 - (d) Theological Institutions
- 5. What are the Biblical references about removing barriers and reaching out to people with disabilities?**
- 6. Examples of Jesus’ encounter with people affected by disability**

Unsuspecting cross-cultural change agents
- 7. Successful models of disability ministry**
 - (a) Personal Models
 - (b) Modelling God’s Love through the Church
 - (c) Training
 - (d) Outreach
 - (e) Summary
- 8. Resources**
 - (a) International Christian organizations serving people with disabilities
 - (b) International secular organizations serving people with disabilities
 - (c) Books and manuals
- 9. Participants of Issue Group 6-B**

1. INTRODUCTION

In South America, a woman with cerebral palsy has been lying in bed for 7 years in a back bedroom of a cinder-block home. In Africa, a young girl with Down syndrome is left on a river bank to perish because her parents believe she is a bad omen. In western nations, disabled infants are sometimes starved to death before they are a week or so old. In Asia, a slum dweller with polio is told he must journey through 8 reincarnations before he can be considered a “whole person.”

These are the people about whom God cares passionately. It is clear from a casual reading of the Gospels that Jesus has great compassion for people with disabilities and their families, preferring to spend time with them rather than people of wealth, influence, power, or even those in the religious hierarchy. Whether it was the man born blind in John 9, or the individual with the withered hand in Luke 14, Jesus was "moved with compassion" whenever he encountered people with disabilities.

(a) Leaders represent 23 countries in disability ministry

Thirty-four leaders of disability ministries from 23 countries gathered at Forum 2004 in Thailand to explore ways we could motivate the church to demonstrate this same compassion. Many of these 34 leaders are disabled themselves; all of them work with disabled people. We came together in order to encourage Christ-like compassion in the hearts of pastors around the world. We believe the church of Jesus Christ will be strengthened as it reflects this same compassion toward people with disabilities.

Each participant was a leader because they ignited others and influenced their cultures, institutions, systems and people around them whether by extraordinary action, academic accomplishment, as intellectuals or as an icon of what they represented. They were identified from around the world and were invited to this summit. Most of the leaders in this Issue Group represented grassroots leadership. It was as if they were silent warriors from the front lines who showed up with dirt still on their field uniforms.

The participants in the Issue Group for Ministry among People with Disabilities were servants. Many of them did not hold formal leadership positions, but assumed leadership because of their vision of community. True servants that were living in hidden corners of globe and expressed that they were motivated from a spiritual calling, moral depth, personal resilience and unending compassion in their character to be Christ's servants to the least of society. They worked in the face of seemingly insurmountable odds and harsh environments. Their servanthood was revolutionary to their cultures. Many times it simply was unwanted. Their cause put them at odds with cultural norms and economic gateways to opportunities. Many, but not all, carried hidden wounds or had disabilities themselves that had sensitized them to the needs of the disabled. They also carried secondary wounds from cultures, systems or societies that tried to ignore, isolate or even allow death to come upon “throw-aways” of society. Their work was not highly decorated or acknowledged, but was rather a grass root movement in communities.

Some of these servants of society creatively and bravely championed the cause of life in the face of poverty, death and injustice. Others advocated for public policy that protected the value of human life and called for community inclusiveness and equality. They all had a vision of a healthy integrated community and systems to ensure socio-economic equality that included every human life and worked practically to create that in their communities. They were leaders whose point of influence rippled out from their servanthood and their perceived weakness. And they were effective.

During our discussions and research, we agreed that every pastor in every part of the globe will, without exception, encounter a disabled person. We realized that many pastors will feel ill-prepared and under-equipped for ministering the love of Christ to these people and their families. It was our desire to provide for a pastor, in this Lausanne Occasional Paper, basic information, tools and models which will help every Christian to reach out and share God's love within the disabled community.

Summary: At the conclusion of our nine days together at Forum 2004, we underscored that:

- the whole church must obey the Master's mandate as stated in Luke 14:21-23
- to go out with the whole gospel and, with love, compel all people with disabilities to come in;
- that the Father's house may be full,
- that they might know His awesome power in weakness,
- that all may worship Him together and that
- the rule and reign of the Kingdom of God should be established in all the earth.

(b) Three Messages to the Church

We listed 3 short affirmations to the church worldwide that were presented to the 2004 Forum:

1. ***Kingdom Inclusion:*** *We believe that the church must remove physical, emotional and spiritual barriers in order to bring in people with disabilities and charge them through discipleship and training to use their spiritual gifts.*
2. ***The Glory of the Bride:*** *We believe that when the disabled, poor and marginalized are utilized in outreach of the Kingdom, the fullness of the Bride of Christ only then reflects the glory of the Bridegroom.*
3. ***Kingdom Empowerment:*** *We believe that the church fulfils scriptural mandates through training and equipping people with disabilities in order to help them exercise their God-given gifts in building the Body of Christ.*

2. WHO ARE “THE DISABLED?”

In 1996 the World Health Organization estimated that 10 to 11% of the world’s population has a disability — “up to 600 million.”¹ There is a need, especially in developing countries, for over 20 million wheelchairs.² The world of disabled people is varied – in countries with rich resources, some people with disabilities may enjoy educational opportunities, be gainfully employed and live independently. However, globally, this is the exception; not the rule.

This Issue Group for Ministering among People with Disabilities at the 2004 Forum was the first time that “people with disabilities” was acknowledged as a sociologic “people group”. A “people group” is a more specific definition by which to categorize and analyze a grouping of people rather than by national definitions. People groups have been used most often in literature in the context of ethno-linguistic or ethno-geographic definitions. However, this year the definition was widened to be more inclusive of people with disabilities as a definable people group. Therefore, it became essential to also understand who the emerging leadership was in this population of people particularly in the developing world.

The sort of language we use reflects much about our attitudes. Words like “invalid” communicate the idea that the disabled person is in-valid. Although it is impossible to determine a standard for every language, we should remember to use a “person first” description. For example, it is appropriate to say “a child who is mentally retarded” and not “a retard.” People with disabilities are just that: *people* who happen to have a *disability*.

(a) *Issues faced everyday*

Disabled people in most parts of the world live in unbelievable poverty and isolation. They lack simple mobility and are often hidden away in back bedrooms because of fear and prejudice. In many countries, the only income a disabled person has is by begging. In cultures gripped by social stigmas, parents may maim a child, hoping that as a beggar (s)he will evoke sympathy from passers-by. In some countries, people who are ‘learning disabled’ (e.g. mentally retarded, Down syndrome, or cerebral palsy) are unnecessarily institutionalized or warehoused in mental wards. This sad situation also occurs among many deaf and deaf-blind people.

In industrialized countries, abortion, infanticide and euthanasia are seen as disability-prevention strategies. When a society is influenced by secular humanism, disabled people who lack the resources to live independently are viewed as a drain on economic resources.

Whether in wealthy nations or in developing countries, disabled people are frequently cut off or marginalized from society. Because they are not mainstreamed into the community, they do not enjoy ready access to the local church. Often the church building is inaccessible (stairs, no ramps, narrow doorways, etc.) Church programs quite often can be at least equally inaccessible or non-existent.

If we were to place these 600 to 650 million people together, they would comprise the world’s third largest nation with the highest rates of homelessness, joblessness, divorce, abuse, and suicide. People with disabilities are often the victims of crime and abuse. A polio-survivor from Ethiopia has said, “Women in wheelchairs, like me, are easy targets of rape and physical abuse. People know we can’t defend ourselves.”³

Only 5 to 10% of the world’s disabled are effectively reached with the gospel, making the disability community one of the largest unreached — some say under-reached — or hidden

¹ World Health Organization. Declining Resources for Rehabilitation: A Matter of Concern. January 30, 1996. <http://www.who.int/en/>.

² Henry Hof, Dr Ralf Hotchkiss, and Dr Peter Pfaelzer, Building Wheelchairs, Creating Opportunities, Technology and Disability, International Perspectives, 2:2 (Spring 1993). http://whirlwind.sfsu.edu/general_info/news_articles/building_wheelchairs/.

³ Personal conversation with Diana Mood, Director of *Global Transformation Network*

people groups in the world. Jesus, aware that this population would be overlooked, made people with disabilities a target group of the Great Commission (Luke 14:12-24).

The church has the opportunity to lead the way in spiritual and social transformation by serving and becoming a loving healing community to this population. In almost every country in the world, a disability often results in a significant decrease in quality of life due to medical complications, poor health, limited independence, little physical fitness, social marginalization and joblessness. The economic impact of a disability within society includes the costs of reduced productivity or a complete loss of jobs, the costs of health care and personal assistance, as well as the added financial costs for a community to serve the basic needs of people with disabilities. Current isolated efforts of empowering those with disabilities, developing new assistive technologies or creating economic opportunities are neither synergized to create social transformation nor are keeping up with the demand for new models of inclusive communities in the 21st Century. The church can begin by being that inclusive community where people experience the healing power of love and are empowered to contribute to society.

A disability can be the result of:

- **Birth defects**, such as Down syndrome, spina bifida to name a few. These physical impairments (sometimes including mental impairments) occur during the development of the baby in the mother's womb.
- **Birth Injuries** occur due to poor care during pregnancy or delivery procedures.
- **Heredity** and other factors involving a family's medical history. This can result in blindness, deafness or other physical impairments. Muscular dystrophy and Huntington's disease are two examples.
- **Diseases** such as river blindness, tuberculosis, measles, malaria or leprosy result in serious visual and physical disabilities. Polio is arguably the most predominant handicapping condition in the world. CNN reported on August 24, 2004, "The polio outbreak that originated in northern Nigeria continues to infect new countries and threatens to become an epidemic across west and central Africa, health officials say...The six remaining polio-endemic countries are: Nigeria, India, Pakistan, Niger, Afghanistan and Egypt."
- **Accidents** can cause a person to become blind, deaf, or paralyzed, often leaving the individual in chronic pain. "Accident or injury remains a major, though less prevalent, cause of disability in older age groups - 19% of people aged between 45 and 64, and 10% of those aged 65 or older."⁴
- **Aging** is becoming a more prevalent reason for disabilities. As life expectancy has increased due to medical care, life styles and prevention many Western countries are experiencing larger geriatric populations with disabilities due to aging.

(b) The Deaf Community

People who are deaf do not usually see themselves as part of the disability community. Deaf individuals have a separate culture from those who are hearing. The Deaf include hearing-impaired adults and children numbering 225 million in the world. Of this group, 70 million profoundly Deaf persons consider themselves culturally separate from hearing-impaired persons. They have their own language, traditions, their own social and educational structures and their own sports clubs and national organizations. Deaf people are highly networked. Deaf people who view themselves as culturally distinct from hard-of-hearing people, require separate mission strategies to reach them with the gospel.

The church in most instances around the world has not yet viewed Deaf people as individuals who can co-labour with the hearing church to reach people for Christ. During Forum 2004 representatives of the Deaf community, Dee and Doc Douglas, Strategy Coordinators for the Deaf People Group of the Central Europe Field presented a compelling argument for the

⁴ Australian Bureau of Statistics, www.abs.gov.au

church to recognize the Deaf as an unreached people group. Among every people group are individuals who will never “hear” the gospel unless the communication barrier is bridged. Communication strategies are needed to provide access to the approximately 225 million individuals who are deaf and hearing-impaired.

3. HOW DOES THE WORLD VIEW PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES?

(a) *Societal Response*

We live in a world which places great emphasis on beauty, wealth and power. People with disabilities are often a symbol of the opposite – they struggle with physical or mental imperfection, powerlessness and often poverty. This only adds to the stigma which isolates them, separating them from the mainstream of life. Discrimination is a problem faced by disabled people and their families around the world. However, James 2:1-4, 9 reminds Christians “...*don't show favouritism. Suppose a man comes into your meeting wearing a gold ring and fine clothes, and a poor man in shabby clothes also comes in. If you show special attention to the man wearing fine clothes and say, "Here's a good seat for you," but say to the poor man, "You stand there" or "Sit on the floor by my feet," have you not discriminated among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts?... But if you show favouritism, you sin and are convicted by the law as lawbreakers.*”

When an individual encounters a disabled person, he may experience fear, awkwardness and embarrassment. If he meets someone who cannot speak, or who drools, cannot walk or is blind, he might anxiously wonder, *What do I say? What should I do?* If he is unsure how to respond, he may ignore the disabled person and walk away. However, Christians are advised in Romans 12:16, “...*Do not be proud, but be willing to associate with people of low position. Do not be conceited.*”

Many people shun the disabled because they feel the overwhelming needs might demand too much of them. They think, *Let someone who has more skill and training help this person. Let the government be responsible; not me.* Yet Christians are also told in James 2:16-17, “*If one of you says to him, 'Go, I wish you well; keep warm and well fed,' but does nothing about his physical needs, what good is it? In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead.*”

(b) *How do other religious and social systems view those with disabilities?*

- Hinduism – A disabled person is “bad karma.” Such a person is of the lowest caste.
- Islam – A disabled person is an object of charity or disgrace in a “shame and honour” culture. A disability is that person’s fate (*inshallah*).
- Communism – A disabled person cannot contribute to society; (s)he has no use.
- Buddhism – A disabled person should deny and ignore his plight.
- Spiritism – A disabled person has been cursed.
- Secular Humanism – A disabled person is a victim and to integrate them into society is considered a significant expense.
- Fascism – A disabled person is an economic drain on society.
- Nazism – A disabled person has no right to life and no role in society.
- Religious Legalism – A disabled person is an object of charity. He or she is the focus of ministry projects which highlight results rather than relationships. However, the real needs of disabled people are the responsibility of the government, not the religious community.

(c) *Taboos and social stigma*

In certain regions of the world, people with disabilities are frequently shunned or cast aside because of a society's belief in taboos and curses. Unfortunately, in many countries even Christians place importance on tribal laws and customs or curses from animist spirits or witch doctors. Children born with visible birth defects are often left to starve to death, or they are drowned. Sometimes a disabled person's family will hide him in the home, causing even more isolation and rejection from neighbours and friends.⁵

⁵ Mary Jane Ponten, Taboo and Disability, Mephibosheth Ministry Training Manual, 2004

The fear generated by taboos and curses was a problem that disabled people faced in Jesus' day. In John 9:2-3, Jesus and His disciples encountered a blind man. *"His disciples asked Him, 'Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?' 'Neither this man nor his parents sinned,' said Jesus, 'but this happened so that the work of God might be displayed in his life.'"* Jesus wanted to display his power through the blind man, as well as demonstrate godly care and compassion.

Christians are called to do the same. We must recognize that a disability is not a "curse from the devil" or a "bad omen" for *"Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law."*⁶ A disability is a human condition through which God's power can be displayed in a life.⁷ Christians are charged with the responsibility to erase fear and prejudice in their communities as they ascribe the same dignity and respect which Jesus Christ gave people with disabilities. Christians will be judged as to how they relate to families affected by disability.⁸

Leviticus 21:18-21 is sometimes cited as an example of God's disfavour and displeasure with disabled people: *"No man who has any defect may come near: no man who is blind or lame, disfigured or deformed; no man with a crippled foot or hand, or who is hunchbacked or dwarfed, or who has any eye defect...No descendant of Aaron the priest who has any defect is to come near to present the offerings made to the Lord by fire. He has a defect; he must not come near to offer the food of his God."* This portion of Scripture has nothing to do with God's attitude toward disabled people; rather, it lists strict criteria for men entering the priesthood of Aaron. A priest had to be pure with no physical defects, because he was a physical symbol of a future spiritual reality – an important type of the coming Messiah. God was looking for a physically perfect man as a priest to represent the spiritually perfect man. This is fulfilled in the Lord Jesus and His atoning sacrifice opened the door for all people to enter the Kingdom of God.

⁶ Galatians 3:13

⁷ II Corinthians 12:9-10

⁸ Matthew 25:31-45

4. HOW DOES GOD VIEW PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES?

(a) *Theological Understanding*

Pastors and their congregations often do not know how to “theologically” view disabled people. A solid theological framework is needed to understand disabilities and God's sovereignty over suffering. Christian leaders are often confused as to the extent of God's sovereign control over accidents and illnesses.

The Bible makes sweeping statements about God's sovereignty over disabilities. For example, Exodus 4:11 states, *“Who gave man his mouth? Who makes him deaf or mute? Who gives him sight or makes him blind? Is it not I, the Lord?”* As it concerns children born with disabilities, Psalm 139:13-14 states, *“For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother's womb. I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made.”* Psychological and emotional disabilities fall under God's decree (Deuteronomy 28:65-67; 1 Samuel 16:14; Daniel 4:31,16, 33-34; Psalm 6:3-4). Of course, Satan sometimes causes illness (Job 2:7; Luke 13:16) – but in these references, as everywhere, Satan unwittingly serves God's ends and purposes.

No trial, no disease or illness, no accident or injury reaches us apart from God's permission. When catastrophes of nature injure people, we are reminded in Lamentations 3:38, *“Is it not from the mouth of the Most High that both calamities and good things come?”* The Lord repeats this in Isaiah 45:7, *“I form the light and create darkness, I bring prosperity and create disaster; I, the Lord, do all these things.”* In the New Testament this theme is repeated in 1 Thessalonians 3:3 where Paul writes, *“You know quite well that we were destined for [trials]”*. However, Ephesians 1:11 exclaims God's upper hand by declaring, *“[God] works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will.”*

God may not *initiate* all our trials, including diseases, birth deformities and injuries, but by the time they reach us, they are His will for us for whatever time and purpose that He determines. When Satan, other people, or accidents bring us sorrow, we can answer like Joseph to his brothers who sold him into slavery, *“As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good.”*

While it is true that God is sovereign, it is also true that he takes no pleasure in our suffering. Lamentations 3:32-33 assures us that, *“Though he brings grief, he will show compassion, so great is his unfailing love. For he does not willingly bring affliction or grief to the children of men.”* Comfort and the spiritual strength to overcome grief, affliction and loss is found that God weeps with us and that He is absolutely present in our darkest hour of need. As our Great Shepherd, He walks us through the valley of the shadow of death every time (Psalm. 23). Yet, God permits what he hates to accomplish that which he loves.⁹

This view of God's sovereignty is not only a great comfort to disabled people and their families; it can serve as a holistic, God-centred philosophical basis for a church's active outreach to disabled people and their families. One might ask, what is the wisdom of God in the way that He uses broken vessels, discarded lives, humiliation and pain? Why would a God so grand an architect of creation, who in fact did not create evil, pain, loss, disappointment and sin, chose then to adopt a pattern of turning human history on the hinges of human humility and human weakness? The journey to discover God's hand in a disabling condition leads to the discovery of God's consistent nature and the truth of His word.

There are many references which explain just a few of the benefits of affliction.

- A person's disability can increase our awareness of the sustaining power of God to whom we owe our sustenance. *“Praise be to the Lord, to God our Saviour, who daily bears our burdens.”*(Psalm 68:19)
- God uses suffering to refine, perfect, strengthen, and keep us from falling. *“Praise our God... he has preserved our lives and kept our feet from slipping.”* (Psalm 66:8-9)

⁹ Steve Estes and Joni Eareckson Tada, When God Weeps (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1998).

- “... it was fitting that God, for whom and through whom everything exists, should make the author of their salvation perfect through suffering.” (Hebrews 2:10)
- A disability allows the life of Christ to be manifested to others through the flesh. God builds strength, virtue, compassion, faith and sacrificial love into His children “*to become conformed to the image of His son.*” (Romans 8:29) The church begins to radiate the beauty of the Bridegroom as she engages in selfless acts of compassion, soaking prayer for the hurting, reaching out to the needy and equipping all saints (including those with disabilities) for the work of the ministry (including cross cultural missions). “*But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us. We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed. We always carry around in our body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be revealed in our body.*” (2 Corinthians 4:7-10)
 - A disability bankrupts us, making us radically dependent on God. We abandon ourselves to Him as the source of our purpose, joy, power, and celebration of life. In Him we are not afraid of our weakness because it is there that we discover the sufficiency of His grace. “*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.*” (2 Corinthians 12:9) “But this happened that we might not rely on ourselves but on God, who raises the dead.” (2 Corinthians 1:9)
 - A disability teaches us that God is more concerned with the character He is building in us, yet He comforts us in His arms on the journey to His destiny for us. What a wonderful promise we have in Isaiah’s words: “*The Lord will come with might, with His arm ruling for Him...In His arm He will gather His lambs and carry them in His bosom.*” (Isaiah 40: 10-11). Paul underlines this: “*Not only so, but we also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope.*” (Romans 5:3-4)
 - A disability teaches us that the greatest good of the Christian life is not absence of pain, but Christ-likeness. “*And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose. For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers.*” (Romans 8:28-29)
 - A disability identifies us with Christ, making us co-labourers in redemption, in releasing creation from its bondage into the glory of the Father. Winston Churchill has said, “*Great doors often swing on small hinges.*” When disabled people are encouraged to embrace Jesus’ will for their lives, they enter into a deep experience of identification with Him, realizing what it means to be a co-heir with Him. Conversely, as a congregation embraces those with disabilities, the church redeems the value placed on all those whom God loves, as well as displays God’s glory to society.
 - A disability creates an intimate identification between a person and his Saviour, empowering him to minister out of weakness and brokenness, as did Christ. In outreach and missions, God often uses vulnerability or weakness as a point of identification to initiate his work. Philippians 2:6-8 says of Jesus, that “*being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men...he humbled himself and became obedient to death, even death on the cross.*” Jesus calls us to minister through our weakness to a world of broken cultures, failed economies and collapsed political systems. Identification is the model Jesus chooses to establish his Kingdom.

It is not only the compassion in outreach that will fulfil the Great Commission. We must “put on the mind of Christ” and in humility learn it is “more blessed to give than to receive”. Everyone has life-defining limitations and as we serve the needy we identify with those we serve and recognize our own dependency upon God in our weaknesses. The church becomes a loving

and an empowering community when people care for those who are suffering. God's plan for what society should look like is entrusted to the church.

When people with disabilities trust God, it gives him glory. He is shown to be a God of supreme and massive worth when people with disabilities think He is important enough to love and obey despite suffering. Sufferings bond Christians to the Man of Sorrows like nothing else. People who suffer have something eternally precious in common with Christ and that is their affliction. A Christian's scars and anguish, rejection and pain give the believer a small taste of what the Saviour endured to purchase the Christian's redemption.

(b) Divine Healing

In many parts of the world, Christians are suffering with Christ in great personal affliction, in catastrophic events and sociopolitical conflicts. At the same time, there are spiritual movements manifesting "signs and wonders," and "gifts of healing". Regretfully, there is a rift between different Christian traditions where people with disabilities become deeply wounded rather than fully experience God's grace. On one hand, people with disabilities, struggling against hopelessness and pain, are drawn to the hope of miraculous healing. Using wheelchairs, white canes, and walkers, these people flood to healing services or "healing crusades" where relief from pain and physical affliction is not only offered, but sometimes even guaranteed. All that appears to be required is faith on the part of the person with a disability or his or her family. Unfortunately, the small seed of faith many people with disabilities possess is often "shipwrecked" when they leave without experiencing a healing.¹⁰

On the other hand, people are sometimes told that "God is in charge, so endure it. God wants you to be that way or he would not have allowed it or he would have changed it." These churches rarely expect God to heal a person and so they will ignore James 5:14-15 where it says, "*Is anyone among you sick? Then he must call for the elders of the church and they are to pray over him, anointing him...and the prayer offered in faith will restore.*"

Either of these messages do not fully communicate the compassionate ministry of Jesus to hurting people on earth. People with disabilities become deeply disappointed over having been denied healing by God or being abandoned by Him to intervene in their pain, loss and disability. As a result, a root of bitterness and scepticism about the Christian faith often takes hold.¹¹

Theologically, we must exercise balance not polarization. There is great hope in Jesus ministry, life, cross and resurrection. The grace of the cross of suffering heals in the deepest sense. Faith to transcend a disability through healing or the godly character to overcome human suffering are both found in the cross. A disciple is called to build faith and build character concurrently because they are both tools of God to shape the human soul into image of His Son.

Many churches – even denominations – do not have a theological framework in which people with disabilities "fit." The illness or injury is therefore an embarrassment to a church; if the person does not experience healing after many prayers, then "something must be wrong with his faith." Often a disabled person – or the parent of a disabled child – is told, "The problem isn't with God. The blame must be yours." The truth is real hope is found in the holistic healing work of the suffering Christ "*who endured the cross and despised the shame*" (Hebrews 12:2) in order to make us whole in Himself with or without a disability. That healing journey for us is an unending. Jesus did not escape suffering and yet He was victorious over it for our sake (Isaiah 53:5). He did not remove suffering from human history yet he stripped Satan's power to ultimately rule by it. Now Jesus calls us to suffer redemptively, resting in Him while praying boldly to the Father to intervene on the behalf of our brothers and sisters. Identified with Christ, we then can stand up on the threshold of hell and open the windows of heaven.

The challenge to the church is to communicate the love of Christ to people with disabilities without adding to the gospel a condition of physical healing. In God's Kingdom believers with disabilities should never be considered second-class Christians because of their

¹⁰ 1 Timothy 1:9

¹¹ Hebrews 12:15

physical or mental impairment. We should not assume that “healing” would be a sign of blessing or an indication of purer faith or spiritual growth.

What does the Bible say about healing? First, everyone who takes the Bible seriously agrees that God hates suffering. Jesus spent much of His time relieving it. Even when God has to punish sin, he says in Ezekiel 18:32 that it gives him no pleasure. However, it simply does not follow that God’s relationship to suffering is to heal it. For as much as He hates suffering, He hates sin more.

The core of Christ’s plan is to rescue us from our transgressions – and He will often use suffering to help us become aware of our sin, as well as repent of it. A disability can reveal the “stuff” of which a person is made, exposing self-centeredness, anxiety, bitterness against God, or fear of the future. Once an individual recognizes his/her character flaws, (s)he is better able to deal with his/her own sin, as well as welcoming the Holy Spirit’s conviction and comfort. 1 Peter 4:1 says, “*Therefore, since Christ suffered in his body, arm yourselves also with the same attitude, because he who has suffered in his body is done with sin.*” Thus, one form of evil, suffering is turned on its head to defeat another form of evil; that is, our transgressions. All to the praise of God’s wisdom in strengthening the child of God. Suffering is often God’s tool in refining the character and faith of the believer.¹²

As it concerns a theology of healing, Reformation theology provides a clear understanding of God’s relationship to suffering. Jesus came to earth in order to deal with sin by paying its penalty on the cross. He also dealt with the results of sin – faced with demon possession, He cast out evil spirits. Finding disease, He healed the sick. Threatened by storms, He said, “Peace be still” and nature obeyed Him. He had come to begin to reverse the curse which had followed man’s fall into sin. The Kingdom of God was established, not as an “all at once” affair, but will completely shine in splendour when Christ returns.

After Jesus went back to heaven, suffering remained prevalent on earth. Jesus healed the sick, but there were many even in His own country that He never met and healed. The Lord raised the dead, but even Lazarus had to die later on. Jesus began His kingdom, but He did not complete it at the time of his coming¹³. This has profound implications concerning divine healing in our present age. For disease is just one of the many results of sin that Jesus began, but did not finish, dealing with when He started His kingdom on earth. Had Jesus finalized His kingdom at His first advent, most of the world would never have heard the gospel. Modern-day Christians are living stones being placed in the kingdom building¹⁴ and until the last soul is saved, suffering will remain in the world¹⁵.

The Body of Christ must encourage people with disabilities not to ignore, despise, or seek to only escape from affliction, Christians must help them ascribe positive meaning to their situations – the verses in the previous section can help. God in His mercy may, from time to time, grant people with disabilities healing as a gracious glimpse of the day when *every* eye shall be opened and “*the lame shall leap like deer*”¹⁶,” but in the meantime we are living in “*this present age*,” as the Bible calls it¹⁷ and the emphasis on earthly trials in the New Testament gives us the impression that followers of Jesus Christ are going to have to put up with a lot of problems until God calls them home. The Bible specifically says that all who follow Him can expect hardship, and that includes people with disabilities and their families¹⁸. “*To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in His steps*”

¹² 1 Peter 1:7

¹³ Ephesians 1:13-14; Acts 1:1 refers to the record about Jesus given in the Gospel of Luke as “all that Jesus *began* to do and teach.” (our italics)

¹⁴ 1 Peter 2:5

¹⁵ 2 Corinthians 4:16; II Corinthians 5:2-4

¹⁶ Isaiah 35:3-5

¹⁷ Titus 2:12

¹⁸ 2 Corinthians 1:5; Acts 14:22, Romans 8:17

(c) Should People with Disabilities Seek Healing?

When believers become ill, the Bible encourages them to seek healing¹⁹. However, how should ill or injured people view scripture when healing and relief from suffering does not come? Mark 1:32-39 and Luke 9:12 provide insight. In Mark 1:32-34, we see Jesus healing “*all the sick and demon possessed... and many who had various diseases.*” Very early on the next morning, Jesus went off to a solitary place to pray. When the crowds returned with more sick and disabled people, the disciples went to look for him. “*When they found him, they exclaimed: ‘Everyone is looking for you!’ Jesus replied, ‘Let’s go somewhere else – to the nearby villages – so I can preach there also. That is why I have come’*”

It is not that Jesus didn’t care about the cancer-ridden, blind or those with disabilities; it is that their illnesses were not his sole focus: the gospel was. The Lord’s message was: Sin will kill you, hell is real, God is merciful, His kingdom will change you and I am not only your passport but I have come to live abundantly in and through you. Whenever people missed this, and they started coming to him to have their pains and problems removed, the Saviour backed away. God’s purpose in redemption was not to make people’s lives happy, healthy and free of trouble; His purpose was to rescue them from sin then conform them from the inside out to the image of His Son by the power of His Spirit.²⁰

God can, and sometimes does, heal people in miraculous ways today, but the Bible does *not* teach that He will always heal those who come to him in faith. His sovereignty reserves the right to heal or not to heal as He sees fit.²¹ For the person with the disability who does not experience healing, God will grant the strength to endure hardship²². He will grant spiritual wisdom²³. Finally, He will reward those who are faithful, those who trust Him through affliction²⁴.

A disabled believer can enrich a Christian community, so that able-bodied believers can learn by faith to grow beyond their hidden weaknesses and limitations. Christians with disabilities – especially those in positions of leadership -- can serve as God’s best “audio visual aids” of His power being made perfect in weakness. In our hurting and fractured world, this is a powerful lesson that needs to be demonstrated; we at Forum 2004 believe that God is choosing people with disabilities through whom He can illustrate for the rest of the world and for the church, these truths. One delegate stated clearly, “A church without a disabled person is a disabled church.”

A powerful expression of these truths occurred at the conference. On the last night our Issue Group, many of whom were disabled themselves, began to pray for healing for those who were ill or in pain. The Holy Spirit then led us to pray for all the nations and people groups that were represented in the room. The power of God love and joy spilled over. After interceding the group suddenly began to dance whether in wheelchairs, on crutches or on legs in a holy chain of rejoicing in God’s overwhelming love. The chain wove through the lobby and able bodied participants of the Forum joined in or cheered as God was glorified in the praises of His earthen vessels.

(d) Theological Institutions

Disability ministry must be addressed not only in local churches, but in Christian institutions of higher learning. Only as students in Bible colleges and seminaries are taught to view disabled persons as Christ would view them, can we hope that families affected by disability will one day be fully integrated into the life of every church, the marketplace, mission agencies and all Christ centred organizations so we can be a leading example of social transformation.

¹⁹ James 5:14-15

²⁰ Romans 8:28

²¹ 1 Peter 3:17, 1 Peter 4:19, 1 Thessalonians 5:18

²² 2 Corinthians 12:9-10

²³ 2 Corinthians 4:7-12, 16-18

²⁴ James 1:12, Revelation 2:10

For those who are working in seminaries and colleges, the following points can serve as a guide to enhancing disability ministry education among potential pastors and educators. Theological institutions can serve the cause of disability by:

- Aggressively underscoring a Biblical view on miracles and divine healing as it concerns people with disabilities. Students must understand that in the age of grace, God's primary relationship to suffering is not necessarily to miraculously remove it, but *use* it to cultivate maturity, faith, and a culture of service.
- Promoting models of inclusion with people with disabilities to remove negative stereotypes, build new models of learning communities, construct new models of education and inform students on how to effectively minister to people with disabilities and their families and mobilize them into ministry.
- Reinforcing not only the declarative aspects of the gospel of Christ, but the demonstrative. The preaching of God's word must always be accompanied by practical works of mercy.
- Opening up opportunities for people with disabilities to exercise their spiritual gifts on a seminary level, including teaching and preaching.
- Requiring all students – especially missionaries – to complete coursework which will provide practical education on relating the gospel to people with disabilities and train them as a new wave of cross cultural missionaries.
- Making their facilities barrier-free and physically and programmatically more flexible and accessible to disabled students.

5. WHAT ARE THE BIBLICAL REFERENCES ABOUT REMOVING BARRIERS AND REACHING OUT TO PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES?

The 34 disability ministry leaders gathered at Forum 2004 Thailand agreed the Saviour's words in Luke 14:13-14 provide an irrefutable mandate to the church to reach out to people with disabilities with the gospel: "*When thou makest a feast, call the poor, the maimed, the lame, the blind: And thou shalt be blessed; for they cannot recompense thee: for thou shalt be recompensed at the resurrection of the just.*" True, this passage highlights how God's grace is lavished on the undeserving – specifically the Gentiles. Yet the passage also contains a powerful lesson about disability ministry. When you "*give a banquet,*" Jesus says:

- *...do not invite your friends, your brothers or relatives, or your rich neighbours... But when you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, and you will be blessed*" (v. 12, 13,14). A key word here is "invite." Why make the special effort to reach out to the poor and those disabled? Because Jesus asks us to. Our natural inclination is not to befriend these people; so our Saviour commands us to break out of our comfort zones and invite the poor and lame into his family. Jesus is not asking us to pity-the-poor-unfortunate; but to change our thinking.
- *"...you will be blessed"* (v. 14). Social services for poor and disabled people operate on the premise that the "have's" have something to give to the "have-not's," but this reinforces attitudes of condescension and paternalism. It also fosters pride. "*God has made the poor of this world to be rich in faith*" and he wants us to see it is more blessed to give than to receive. Jesus came "*not to be served, but to serve*" and we learn humility and God's priorities when we serve with an eye to his glory and with a heart showing his mercy.
- *"Although they cannot repay you, you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous"* (v. 14). It costs something to address the needs of people with disabilities – volunteer time, finances, effort -- yet even 2000 years ago, Jesus touched on this, negating the mentality, "What can these individuals give back to us? To our church?" We must not think of ministry in terms of the return-on-investment, but on a resurrection-minded investment.
- *"Go out quickly into the streets and alleys and bring in the poor, the crippled, the blind and the lame"* (v. 21). The adverb "quickly" shows the urgency of the mandate as well as the need – the culture of death and the devaluing of human life which is increasing around the world is a threat to the lives of disabled people. The church must move quickly. "Streets and alleys" remind us to think outside the "norm" and literally search for these people, many of whom are relegated to back bedrooms of nursing homes. Streets and alleys? Many disabled people live on the streets.
- *"Go out to the roads and country lanes, make them come in..."* (v. 23). We shouldn't plan a church outreach, expecting disabled people to simply come in. We are called to "go out." We may have to provide transportation or other assistance. When it comes to "making" them come in, one translation says "compel" them. In other words, be ready with a compelling reason as to why people with disabilities or the poor or blind would feel welcomed and accepted.
- *"...so that my house will be full"* (v. 24). The Father wants us to see that the Body of Christ is incomplete without poor or maimed, blind or disabled people included in our fellowship. After all, "*the weaker members are indispensable;*" this is because "*God's power shows up best in weakness.*" Let's serve as Christ served... let's give rather than receive... let's follow the Luke 14 mandate of Jesus!

The following verses highlight the need to remove barriers of attitudes and physical barriers in order to demonstrate Christ's love to disabled people. Christians must show comfort and

encouragement to all those in need (2 Corinthians 1:3-5). Christians should show empathy and understanding to families affected by disability in order to win them to Christ (1 Corinthians 9:22-23). Believers are called to provide practical or “hands-on” assistance (Job 29:15-16). Christians can serve as community advocates for the disabled, pleading their cause to others (Jeremiah 22:16). The church is warned not to despise or shun disabled people; this displeases God (Leviticus 19:14; Deuteronomy 27:19).

Believers are to be mercy-ministers out of devotion to God, not dry duty (Romans 12:10-12). All discrimination against the disabled should be done away with (Colossians 3:11). We should accept one another because Christ has accepted us (Romans 15:7). To show hospitality to people with disabilities is to be the norm (Hebrews 13:1-3). Believers must demonstrate compassion (“with-suffering”) to the disabled (Colossians 3:12-14). To bear the burdens of someone with a disability fulfils a command of scripture (Galatians 6:2). Finally, 2 Samuel 9:3-4 tells the story of David’s kindness to Mephibosheth, the lame son of Jonathan, modelling the way the church should minister.

6. EXAMPLES OF JESUS' ENCOUNTERS WITH PEOPLE AFFECTED BY DISABILITY

Jesus Christ provides the single and most powerful model of the way Christians can minister to the disabled. On nearly every page of every gospel, one can see Jesus relating to, ministering among, conversing with, and meeting the needs of families affected by disability. This confused and bewildered his disciples.²⁵ Even the followers of John the Baptist doubted that Jesus was the Messiah, given that He spent so much time with the “wrong people.”²⁶ Jesus worked among disabled people, not only to perform signs and wonders through healings, but He intended to destroy the social and religious hierarchy that separated people on the basis of ability.

The Gospel of John 9:1-8 records the testimony of Jesus about a blind man: “... *this happened so that the work of God might be displayed in his life.*” In John 11:4, Jesus said, “*This sickness will not end in death. No, it is for God's glory so that God's Son may be glorified through it.*” Jesus did not “use” disabled people as audio-visual aids of his Messiah-ship; He desired to include them in the kingdom of God (Luke 14:12-13, 23). God forbid if the afflictions of an unsaved disabled person were only a foretaste of the suffering they would know in hell; 2 Peter 3:9 tells us that God wants no one to perish, but everyone to come to repentance – Jesus especially showcased this in that he particularly reached out to the disabled while he ministered on earth. He calls us to have the same attitude.²⁷

Jesus underscores the critical importance of reaching out to families with a disabled member. In Matthew 25:40 Jesus speaks to the “separating out” of those who will not enter His kingdom when He says, “*Truly I say to you, to the extent that you did it to one of these brothers of Mine; even the least of them, you did it to Me.*”

Unsuspecting cross cultural change agents

Social transformation usually requires changes that comes from the top down and bottom up approach. Leadership is needed to champion or coach those changes in both directions. Often organizations or social structures resist change unless there is a benefit or profit to them. In order to understand why people with disabilities can create social change that crosses cultural barriers, then one needs to understand the concept of identification.

The power of identification can either be divisive or open the door of change. A self centred worldview will seek to identify with anyone or thing that will afford it the power to dominate. Gangs, oppressive political systems, or cultural definitions that marginalize people with less voice or power are the dark side of use of power. The brother of Dr. Jonas Salk, a holocaust survivor once said, “It is within the heart of man to dominate”. Therefore, discrimination, injustice and marginalization are created when power is abused. People with disabilities or those who have faced life defining limitations know the pain of the invisible barriers that prevent equality in social life. Our human capacity to identify with another person for good or evil can be conditioned by the environment or upbringing.

However, the power of identification is particularly an important concept to understand in order to create positive social change. Culture is defined in many ways. It can be defined by differences of race, socio-economics, ethnicity, linguistics etc... To lead change that overcomes differences of cultures whether they are visible, invisible, subtle or passionate, a common point of identification is needed. Pain, weakness, hurt and disappointment are some of the most powerful human experiences that others can identify with. People are inspired when they see or encounter bravery, courage, determination and an overcoming spirit in the human soul. Anyone can identify with Eric Liddell's accomplishment to win the gold medal in the 1926 Olympics in Paris overcoming a fall on the race track or the principled endurance of Nelson Mandela to overcome

²⁵ Mark 10:46-52 When the disciples witnessed the high life priority Jesus placed on this blind man, their attitudes were transformed.

²⁶ Luke 7:20

²⁷ Philippians 2:5

decades of imprisonment in a South African jail cell to lead the nation to abandon the oppression of Apartheid. The human soul often hides weakness and protects itself against pain and loss. The door to consider a new change is opened when another person's accomplishment overcomes the odds.

Identification can lead to inspiration and trust. Inspiration to change or improve can happen at the moment a person recognizes, "If he can do that, then I can overcome my limitation". Or one may say, "If she endured that, then I trust what she what says because I can identify with her". The person with whom one can identify with has in other words, "won the right to be heard" and can be trusted. A number of emotions and decisions that motivate change are experienced; safety (trust), courage, bravery, inspiration, etc... If an agent of social change has a disposition of humility or true selflessness, listens and works to minimize threats, shame and the "loss of face", it creates the space to consider the rationale, values and implications of the proposed change.

A couple of case studies illustrate how a person with a disability can be effective in creating cross cultural social change.

First, Tom Brewster, a quadriplegic and professor of Linguistics and Language Acquisition from Fuller Theological Seminary was staying in the home of a community health worker in Honduras. Tom was there to assist with establishing a written form a difficult Indian language. There was a village nearby where the community health worker was not able to move the village forward with their health needs. Tom knew the tribe had a strong spiritual worldview so he asked the community health worker if he could go to the village with a rather novel approach. He wheeled his electric wheelchair into the centre of the village. It was a novelty. He sat for two days and simply read the Gospel of John relating God's identification with us in His love for all of us. On the first day, the children gathered around him. Soon the parents followed behind the children. Later, out of the huts emerged a number of family members with disabilities that the community health worker had never seen before. The result was that two new public health projects were formed. In effect, the people identified with Tom's weakness – entrapped in his chair. The simple visual aid of Tom in his wheelchair, humble in disposition with an overcoming spirit allowed the village to see his weakness as a bridge to cross over cultural barriers. The village members were able to identify with him. They were not imprisoned with paralysis, but they understood the imprisonment of poverty and marginalization. Without him saying anything except reading, Tom won their trust. They were interested in change that holistically addressed their spiritual lives, cycles of poverty and community health.

Second, Stephen was working on a development project in North Africa. He was from the Philippines, loved sports and was good at soccer. He was well received in the city he worked in because after work he loved to play ball with the kids in the park. Although his engineering project was not renewed he got another job and stayed because of his friendship with a couple of kids with disabilities that looked up to him. He formed a wheelchair basketball team with their friends who also had disabilities. With more kids, he created more teams. As a natural coach he also got to know the families. In a shame and honour culture he knew that the parents did not have a support structure and that some of the kids were not registered with the Ministry of Health. He set up disability associations. Several years later, his teams had competed in Europe and won respect for their country. The community asked him to advise them how to address the needs of people with disabilities. This was a significant cultural shift for the government and community. His value of the kids on the wheelchair teams, although they were disabled, gave the parents the ability to see beyond their cultural shame. Their accomplishments, although with children with disabilities, honoured the country and allowed the community to identify with the value Stephen gave the children. The children with disabilities became a trustworthy message that in overcoming their shame and weakness, the community could embrace values that allowed them to engage the holistic health of the families with disabilities.

7. SUCCESSFUL MODELS OF DISABILITY MINISTRY

(a) Personal Models

It is difficult to change people's hurtful attitudes toward individuals with disabilities. Whether in the church, local community, or society at large, attitudes find their root in the heart.²⁸ Proverbs 4:23 says, "...Guard your heart, for it is the wellspring of life." God charges each Christian to personally model his attitude: "*Do nothing out of ... vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others. Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus.*"²⁹ The following are personal guidelines for a Christian to follow when encountering a disabled person or his family:

- Review in the Gospels the example of Jesus and how He treated disabled persons. Ask several Christians to pray for you as you endeavour to reach out to the disabled in your community.
- Don't assume the worst; assume the best about the person. Have a positive outlook. The practice of negative thinking has no value.³⁰
- Do not look at the person's impairment; look into the eyes and smile.
- Reach out and touch the person, if not with a handshake, then with a hand on the shoulder. Do not pat a person's head as you would a child.
- Do not shout at a blind man; he can hear you.
- Use a pencil and paper to communicate with a deaf person. If (s)he cannot read, you can draw pictures.
- Communicate with the disabled person as you would anyone else, asking about family, home or other interests; do not talk only about the disability. Feel free to ask questions – avoid questions which are morbid or highly personal.
- Invite the person to church and ask questions as to how you and your congregation might make his or her visit a positive experience. If (s)he uses a wheelchair, it may be necessary to construct a ramp (using boards). If (s)he "walks" using his hands, remember the lesson of James 2:2-4.
- Visit the disabled person in his or her home; this will give you a clear idea of the needs of the family. Find a way to help the family – they also are weary and isolated. In Proverbs 31:8-9, God calls us to advocate on behalf of the disabled.
- Introduce the disabled person to other members of your congregation.

(b) Modelling God's Love through the Church

When it comes to evangelism among disabled people and their families, the gospel cannot be given in word only; it must be accompanied by action. The disability requires that physical circumstances be addressed when sharing the gospel. Disabled people who experience God's love through the alleviating or sharing of their burden usually remain true to the faith. Evangelism among the disabled which lacks the "relief of a burden," rarely lasts.

When designing a program for disabled people, your church should start "small." Most of the models listed in this section follow the design of a "Seed Project." A Seed Project is a useful, practical way to develop an evangelism outreach to disabled people in your community.³¹ This outline involves:

- A "Seed Project" is a small outreach done by the local church into their community using local resources.
- Undergird the idea with prayer.

²⁸ Jeremiah 17:9-10

²⁹ Philippians 2: 3-5

³⁰ 1 Corinthians 13:4-7

³¹ The "Seed Project" concept was presented to GB6-B by Robert Moffit of Haven of Hope Ministries.

- Do not be paternalistic toward unchurched people. Rather, empower them. For example, Boaz instructed the workers to leave grain behind for Ruth to pick up. He could have simply handed her grain. Instead, Boaz had to work for her provision.
- The project should be completed in a short period of time (1 to 2 days).
- Any Seed Project should have a clear message to the people being served that the love of Jesus is the motivation. Present the gospel to people who seem open.
- As opposed to “proclamation evangelism,” this is “demonstration evangelism.”

(c) Training

Your church members will require a degree of training to sensitize them to the disabled. Rather than focusing on outreach right away, begin addressing the needs of the disabled people in your own congregation. The following list highlights “Seed Projects” which focus on training:

Disability Training Program for Sunday School

Educate your boys and girls using the stories of people like Joni Eareckson Tada and others who use wheelchairs or who are blind, or deaf. Invite a disabled person to share his/her testimony in Sunday school and have the children ask questions. Programs can be designed for children ages 4-12, teenagers, etc. For curriculum and resources, contact Joni and Friends (see Resources).

1. Your adult Sunday school could hold a class on disability ministry training. *Hearts in Motion* is a four-week study guide which raises the level of disability awareness in one’s small group or Bible study class. In four lessons, one will learn how to view disability from God’s perspective and help open the doors of one’s church by becoming aware and responsive to the needs of disabled persons. Joni Eareckson Tada has also recorded an audio cassette and video tape to accompany each lesson. For information, click on: www.joniandfriends.org/helps/needhelp.shtml

From Grief to Glory Sunday

Invite the disabled people in your congregation to be part of planning a special Sunday morning service which highlights 2 Corinthians 12:9, God’s power perfected in weakness. Choose hymns or Scripture songs which highlight this theme. If you have a blind member, ask her/him to read the Scripture from Braille. A disabled person could sing a song. At the close of the service, conduct a survey among the members of your congregation to see where the ‘hidden’ disabled people may be. *Through the Roof* in the United Kingdom has curriculum and resources which can be useful in designing a special Sunday service: www.throughtheroof.org

Wheelchair and Disability Etiquette Training

Many people don’t know what to say or do around disabled people using a wheelchair, white cane, crutches or walkers. Contact a local disability organization and ask them to come and hold a Sunday afternoon training session, showing how to push a wheelchair, help a blind person across a street, learn basic sign language to greet people who are deaf, etc.

Build-a-Ramp Day

Make your church ready to welcome wheelchair users by asking skilled workmen in your congregation to build a ramp or widen doorways. They may wonder why they are doing this, since no-one with a wheelchair comes to church. Explain in a short Bible study how God wants us to prepare a place for His people. Use the passage in Luke 14.

One Day Pastors’ Retreat

Invite pastors and lay leaders to a one day retreat for prayer, information and training on how to include people with disabilities in the life and leadership of the church. Use the Bible verses in this paper as a basis for prayer, discussion, and vision casting. Work on sermon outlines together. Suggest to the pastors that they spend 24 hours in a wheelchair and possibly deliver their sermon from a wheelchair. The day can also include testimonies from believers with disabilities.

1. Send personal letters of invitation to each pastor and follow up with a phone call or personal visit.
2. Recruit volunteers from your church to prepare a light meal.
3. Plan to follow up the retreat with disability-related information, such as in this chapter.

Peer Ministry

Take believers from your congregation with long-term disabilities to visit people who are newly disabled to encourage them, share practical input, resources, build a relationship, and eventually share the gospel. The event may take place in a rehabilitation centre, hospital, in homes; or you could put on an event in your church if transportation can be provided. In this case, people with disabilities can share a workshop or testimonies. Also include social workers who are aware of resources in your community. Print up a simple information sheet of resources for each person.

(d) Outreach

Disability Awareness Sunday

This is a special Sunday morning service designed to reach out to unsaved families affected by disability. Design the service with evangelism in mind. Ask a disabled person to share how (s)he came to Christ. Challenge your church members to reach out to the disabled in the community inviting them to church the following Sunday. Preach a sermon on the subject of God's hand in hardship. After church, hold a small lunch with a question and answer session for unchurched disabled people.

A Wheelchair Scrub Day

Many disabled people in your community use adaptive equipment. Some use crutches or canes. Others use prosthetic legs and braces. Some people use walkers and wheelchairs. All of these devices need to be cleaned and scrubbed now and then, but often the cleaning of this equipment is neglected. Your church can design a wheelchair scrub day and invite disabled people to come and bring their wheelchairs or other pieces of equipment.

1. Print and distribute flyers
2. Train volunteers. Have ready buckets of water, soap and scrub brushes, and metal or leather polish.
3. Some disabled people may need to be lifted out of their wheelchairs and comfortably seated while their equipment is being cleaned.
4. Provide music or a drama while people are waiting.
5. Distribute gospel tracts at the end of the equipment cleaning.

Vacation Bible School

Plan a Vacation Bible School making certain to invite children with disabilities, whether they are blind, paralyzed, or mentally retarded. Highlight the examples of disabled people from the word of God. Plan accessible activities. Recruit teachers who are familiar in working with disabled children. For ideas and appropriate VBS curriculum addressing the issue of disabilities, contact:

Joni and Friends
VBS Department
PO Box 3333
Agoura Hills, CA 91376
www.joniandfriends.org

A Luke 14 Banquet

Design a banquet in the manner of Luke 14. Recruit volunteers to prepare food and decorate tables. Design centrepieces for the tables and create small gift baskets. Then, invite a set number of disabled people and their family members to attend a banquet at your church. After

dinner, give away door prizes or gift certificates. Hold a short program highlighting someone's testimony. Declare the gospel at the close of the banquet. This idea follows the principle of Isaiah 58:7-8 which says, "Is it not to divide your bread with the hungry, and bring the homeless poor into the house; when you see the naked, to cover him; and not to hide yourself from your own flesh? Then your light will break out like the dawn, and your recovery will speedily spring forth; and your righteousness will go before you; the glory of the Lord will be your rear guard."

A Fun-Fair Day at Church

Go into the community and find people with disabilities and invite them (as well as the congregation) to a "Fun-Fair," including a sing-along, testimonies, food and crafts, games, makeovers, and wheelchair scrubs.

1. Make sure that the Pastor and Elders are supportive of this idea.
2. Recruit able-bodied volunteers from your church to assist with fancy invitations, to prepare food and decorations, to provide transportation and music, to share testimonies, and to lead and assist with activities on your Fun-Fair Day.
3. Create invitations (flyers) to distribute among people with disabilities and facilities that have disabled people in your community. Deliver 2-3 weeks before the event.
4. Prepare games, activities, crafts, etc. to last for 3-4 hours including lunch. (Occupational Therapists can provide good insight). Focus on the sharing of testimonies to underscore the spiritual element of the day. This can be done formally from the platform and informally around your lunch tables.
5. Make sure that your facility is physically accessible and barrier-free.

Sports and Recreation Day

Invite disabled youth in community for a day of games and sports, etc.

1. Find a venue (indoor is suggested but not necessary).
2. Recruit volunteers to help provide transportation, prepare activities, lead games, prepare meal, assist with disabled people, create invitations, etc.
3. Invite both able-bodied and disabled youth. If possible, keep track of who is coming, making note of the specific disabilities so that you can plan your activities accordingly.
4. Prepare your equipment.
5. Game Examples:
 - Wheelchair Basketball with adaptations
 - Goal Ball / Soccer (if you are playing with blind, you can blindfold everyone or use a ball in a plastic bag which will make a noise)
6. Follow up with regular "Sports Days" if possible.

KidsGames is an international organization which can provide direction and guidance in designing a sports outreach to children with disabilities. Download the disability manual at www.kidsgames.com and click on "Organizer's Site" then "Getting Involved."

Mothers' Day Out

Mothers of disabled children rarely get a break. Design a two-hour Saturday morning program held once a month for mothers of special needs kids. Provide a sitting service for the disabled child while "mum" enjoys fellowship with other women at the church doing sewing activities, getting her hair styled, filing fingernails, receiving a pedicure, swapping recipes, etc. Make sure to provide volunteers who will organize refreshments and guide the activities, including giving nail and hair treatments. A day of "pampering" like this underscores the care and compassion of God as demonstrated through loving Christians. Make sure to decalre the gospel during or at the close of the morning session.

Foot Washing Service

In many developing nations, disabled people do not have mobility equipment, but must "crawl" on their hands and knees – these people "walk" using flip-flops or slippers on their hands, while supporting their weight with their knees. Your church can design a community

outreach to these disabled people by holding a foot washing service (involving feet, legs, and knees). During the service, give a message from John 13:5-14.

1. Use volunteers who have a background in nursing or working with disabled people.
2. Administer basic first aid to any parts of a disabled person's limbs which have become sore or bruised. Complete the foot washing with lotion. Give small gifts to the disabled people and make certain to welcome them back for other church services.

Shopping Weekend for Disabled People

This addresses not only a practical need, but provides a platform during which to share the gospel, one-on-one. It involves taking people with disabilities out for a shopping excursion in the market place (many disabled people are shut-in or shut-out from going shopping).

1. Prepare in advance by contacting the shopping centre and preparing store owners for your arrival. Perhaps certain stores could donate a small gift to your shoppers.
2. Invite a group of disabled people for an excursion to a park, to shopping centre, and to a church for lunch. After this, include a time of fellowship and testimonies, and possibly a movie (suggest the Joni movie).

Camps for people with disabilities

Create opportunities for disabled people to experience camp, with all the normal activities usually held at camp i.e. sing-alongs, a campfire if possible, swimming, playing ball, croquet, cookouts, etc.

1. A camping experience could range from a 'sleepover' at church to a weekend at a fully equipped campsite. In advance, visit the site personally to ascertain accessibility.
2. Provide trained volunteers to assist each individual/family. (Nurses or hospital workers who attend your church can provide guidance here, as well as perform the training).
3. Include a Bible study and opportunities for sharing in groups.

A Family Weekend Retreat

Philippians 4:13-14 says, "I can do everything through him who gives me strength. Yet it was good of you to share in my troubles." It is always good to share in the troubles of disabled people and their families. Depending on the resources of families in your community and the availability of hotels, plan a two-day retreat for families that include a disabled member.

1. Check with hotels to secure one with accessible features and discounts.
2. Plan activities, including pool time, board games, sing-alongs, special speakers, snack times, etc.
3. Begin on a Friday evening with a "mixer" activity to introduce the families to each other. On Saturday, organize an information workshop, a devotional time, fun activities, rest time, and closing with a presentation of the Gospel on Saturday evening.
4. Invite all the families to attend Sunday services at your church.

Prayer Network

People with disabilities have an intimate understanding of the need for prayer. They are uniquely gifted and available to serve a church by praying. People who have profound disabilities and who may not be able to participate in other capacities at church, *can* serve effectively on a prayer team.

1. Appoint a disabled person as leader who has communication skills, either through the telephone and/or internet. Challenge the leader to recruit prayer partners and establish a network.

2. Prayer partners should be provided a routine as to how and when prayer requests will be received, logged, distributed, and answers recorded. Also, give directions regarding confidentiality, etc.
3. Publicize the availability of the prayer network to the church.
4. Provide 'how to pray' materials.

How to Pray for a Handicapped World, published by Joni and Friends. This spiral-bound prayer manual contains 31 days of focused prayer for different nations of the world as well as different disabled people groups.

Disabled Student Outreach

Should you meet a person who is unable to attend school due to their disability, recruit either young people in your church, or several medical professionals or an educator who can provide 1 to 2 days of assistance. The disabled person would need help in signing up for classes, note-taking, and advocating on other issues that require accessibility.

If the disabled person does not have a wheelchair, ask a local hospital or handicap association. For more information, contact the *Wheels for the World* outreach at Joni and Friends. Possibly hold an event to present the wheelchair to the disabled person so that community or church can be involved in the celebration

Birthday Party for Jesus

During the month of December, invite children with disabilities from the neighbourhood to a party at your church. During this party, plan a small gift distribution to help them remember the gift of Jesus Christ. Celebrate with a birthday cake and tell the story of why Jesus came. Include a number of children with and without disabilities so that you can pair them (the buddy system). You will need 3 to 4 adult or teenage volunteers for every 15 children. If at all possible, encourage the parents to enjoy staying at home. We suggest providing birthday cake(s), balloons, lemonade and other snacks. Also include a child-friendly nativity set (possibly made of play dough). Children could also act out the Christmas story.

Love Gift Distribution Day

Plan an evangelism outreach to disabled people through the giving of love gifts. Distribute gifts such as literature, food, toiletry items, etc. Steps to take:

1. Encourage the congregation to pray for weeks before beginning project.
2. Find 15 people with disabilities in the community who have pressing needs, or who are unable to leave their homes. Determine what sort of gift would be most appropriate and whether or not the family would be open to a visit, etc.
3. Send teams of 2 people (include disabled people on the outreach teams if possible) to visit a person with a disability with a love gift, food, a short worship service or simple expressions of friendship such as reading a book or poetry or playing musical instruments (depending on your culture and resources).
4. Follow up! Use this outreach to build a relationship. Teams should be committed to visiting on a regular basis.

Market Place Outreach

Involve your church in constructing ramps for the areas of your village market place which are inaccessible to people with disabilities. As your church members build the ramps (or ramp), distribute Scripture tracts to passers-by. A complete resource guide which provides instructions for building ramps can be located through: The UN Programme on Disability, the lead programme on disability within the United Nations System. It is housed in the Division for

Social Policy and Development at the Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the UN Secretariat.³² In your own country there maybe a UN agent who could be contacted.

Advocacy Campaign

Proverbs 31:8-9 says, “*Open your mouth for the dumb, for the rights of all the unfortunate. Open your mouth, judge righteously, and defend the rights of the afflicted and needy.*” There may be laws in your city which discriminate against people with disabilities. There may be lack of access into public areas of your city. There may be employment practices or policies which are discriminatory. Cast the vision to people in your congregation who are familiar with the law or the workings of city government. Start an advocacy program – with the goal in not only removing discrimination, but developing relationships and sharing Christ’s love with legislators, city councillors, and individuals in the mayor’s office.

Accessibility Day

Locate a place in your town/suburb/village which is inaccessible – it could be the entrance to a museum, park, or playground. Gain permission from the relevant authority install ramps. Work with your mayor’s office or city council. Recruit carpenters and handy-men from your church to spend a construction day building the ramps. Beforehand, solicit donations of materials from local resources. Invite representatives from a local handicap association. Hold a brief formal celebration and give a short gospel presentation.

Wheels for the World Outreach

In select countries, Wheels for the World, a program of the Joni and Friends International Disability Center, partners with local churches and handicap associations in an outreach which involves Bible distribution, as well as the fitting of wheelchairs to needy disabled children and adults. A Wheels for the World distribution also includes evangelism by local pastors, disability ministry training in churches, press conferences, visits to local rehab centres and to centres of government, etc. There may already exist Wheels for the World distributions in your country. For more information contact:

John Wern, Director, Wheels for the World
Joni and Friends International Disability Center
PO Box 3333
Agoura Hills, CA 91376
818-707-5664
jwern@joniandfriends.org

Attendant Relief Services

A disabled person occasionally needs part-time help in dressing in the morning, preparing food, housekeeping, gardening, transportation, etc. Alert the prayer team in your church to bring this need before the Lord. Trust that he will raise up a volunteer(s) to provide intermittent, practical hands-on help. This is a wonderful way to communicate Christ’s love. Perhaps several volunteers can rotate turns, spreading the responsibility among more church members.

Hospital Concert Outreach

Bring a band or choir to a local hospital and put on a program for people in rehabilitation centres or hospitals – you can use a children’s or adult choir or band. Have children distribute small gifts and pray with the disabled people.

1. Find a local hospital or rehabilitation centre that would welcome a Christian group performing a concert for their patients. Make sure to contact the hospital or rehab administrator well in advance to plan the event.

³² You can access the Accessibility Manual at www.un.org/esa/socdev/enable/designm/

2. Have the choir/band return on a monthly or quarterly basis to put on regular concerts. Eventually recruit disabled musicians to join your team.
3. Prepare a “Prayer Brochure” each month with requests from the people you are ministering among.

Parents’ Night Out

Train young volunteers in your church on how to “baby sit” children with disabilities – involve the parents, asking them to specifically assist in training volunteers how to provide care and manage the child’s needs on a short-term basis. Once a month, announce a “Parents’ Night Out” at your church. Invite a limited number of parents to drop off their disabled child at church where volunteers will provide games, snacks, a Christian movie and other structured activities while parents enjoy “respite” and a night out to themselves for several hours. A practical respite care program such as this provides a solid background in sharing the gospel with unsaved parents in your community.

Suffering Seminar

Families of disabled people have many questions about the goodness of God in allowing a disease or disability to touch their loved one. A church can hold a morning or afternoon seminar covering this topic, addressing questions like “How could a loving God allow this to happen to me?” or “Am I being punished for my sin?” Prepare a brief message and invite other disabled people to share their testimonies. Print up material listing pertinent Scriptures, such as those outlined earlier in this chapter. Provide refreshments and plan times of roundtable discussions as well as question and answer periods. Make certain to give the gospel at some point in the program.

Grief and Loss Seminar

Many families suffer grief when a child is born with a severe disability. Also, parents must often deal with loss when the disabled family member dies. Conduct a several-week “mini-mester” (short semester) session on the issues of grief and loss in dealing with disability and death. Sitting down and working through grief, especially old grief is not a comfortable experience. During the mini-mester, discuss the following issues:

- Personal grief and loss resulting from physical disability
- Heartache of a family member living with and caring for a disabled person
- The loss of a child
- The loss of a spouse
- Parents caring for a disabled child for decades

Sunday School Classes for Disabled Children

As disabled children, adults and family members come to Christ through these various outreach programs listed above, your church can provide follow up through regular Sunday school classes. For those with mental disabilities or mental retardation, your church will need to use special age-appropriate curriculum. Remember, disability ministry is simply applying the gospel of grace to these individuals and their families. For more information on how you can design a Sunday school program for mentally handicapped people, contact:

Christian Reformed Church in America
Friendship Ministries
2850 Kalamazoo Avenue, S.E., Grand Rapids, MI 49560
Phone: 800-333-8300; 616-224-0842 Fax: 616-224-0834
E-mail: friendship@friendship.org website: www.friendship.org

(e)Summary

Disability outreach can transform a community. Consider the following testimony by Gesina Blaauw, Director of *God Loves Albania*, a ministry to disabled Albanians and their family members. Gesina writes about a poor, disabled girl: “Suada is a gypsy girl; her skin is dark,

unlike the “real” Albanians. She is also disabled, which means spending all of her time inside the crowded basement apartment (one room plus kitchen) where her family of six lives. When we met her, she had never been to school. She was 14 years old at that time and had grown up partly under Communist Dictatorship. When Albania was liberated, the family took on their former Muslim identity. In other words: Suada became isolated from society; marginalized because of disability and ethnic background. She was illiterate; no idea of Christ, no idea of integration in society and any dreams for the future. Economically, she and her family ranked the lowest. She is now 18.

“With the help of other Christians, we taught her to read and write, provided physical therapy to improve her condition and now she can walk, although with some difficulty. We started sharing Christ with her and she embraced Him as the One she had been expecting. She is now born again, wants to serve the Lord, can read and write and has written a novel and poems; In July 2004, Suada participated in a missionary outreach in the mountains of Albania. She overcame the obstacles of discrimination due to her skin colour and her disability. When she started sharing Christ with the people who had been mocking her, they changed their attitude, and she was able to lead a boy to the Lord after he listened to her testimony. Her desire is to open a home for abandoned children when she is older. Until then she wants to prepare herself as best as possible. We continue to help her in education and with therapy and to build her up in the Lord Jesus. Suada is convinced that God has a special plan for her life.”

Do you recall the examples we listed in the introduction? The examples of disabled people in South America and Asia who were languishing in despair? We pray for that church in South America which will regularly visit the woman with cerebral palsy in that back bedroom, offering comfort, counselling and even physical therapy. God can call you to do the same in your ministry! In Africa, God has called a pastor to rescue disabled children from the river banks and give them hope, help and a home. God can call you to do the same in your ministry! In Western nations, God has called a Sunday school teacher to tell mothers that their disabled unborn child is by God’s design. God can call you to do the same in your ministry! In Asia, God has called an elder to give the gospel truth to the slum dweller with polio who feels he must be reincarnated. God can call you to do the same in your ministry! “Go out, find the poor, the crippled, the blind and the lame and bring them in.” Jesus commands this.

8. RESOURCES

(a) International Christian organizations serving people with disabilities

Joni and Friends International Disability Center

PO Box 3333, Agoura Hills, CA 91376, USA

Phone: 818-707-5664 Fax: 818-707-2391. www.joniandfriends.org

Through the Roof (UK)

Britain Office:

PO Box 353, Epsom, Surrey, KT18 5WS, UK

Director: Paul Dicken

Phone: 01372 749955 Fax: 01372 737040 Minicom: 01372 737041

Email: info@throughtheroof.org

Through the Roof Northern Ireland Office:

PO Box 143, BANGOR County Down, BT19 6BY N I, UK

Coordinator: Beverley Nesbitt

Phone: 028 9145 0681, Email: info@throughtheroof.org

International Fellowship for the Handicapped

* International Office

11 Coastguard Square, Eastbourne, East Sussex, BN22 7EE , UK

Phone: 01323 638744

* Indian Office

Prahbu and Nancy Rayan

937, 6th Avenue, Anna Nagar West, Chennai 600 040, India

Email: raycap@md3.vsnl.net.in

Christian Ministries Disabled Trust, New Zealand

Di Willis, Director

PO Box 13-322, Onehunga. Auckland, New Zealand

Ph: (+64) (09) 636 4763

Email: cmwdt@clear.net.nz

Christian Blind Mission International - U.S.A. (C.B.M.I.)

450 E. Park Avenue, Greenville, SC 29601, USA

Phone: 800-YES-CBMI (937-2264); 864-239-0065 Fax: 864-239-0069

E-mail: info@cbmi-usa.org Website: www.christianity.com/cbmi

C.B.M.I. is the leading provider of eye care programs and services for people suffering from blindness and other disabilities around the world. It supports more than 1,000 projects in 107 countries -- primarily in Asia, Africa, Latin American and in Eastern Europe. C.B.M.I. seeks to recruit medical, educational and rehabilitation professionals for foreign missions opportunities.

World Vision

800 West Chestnut Avenue, Monrovia, CA 91016-3198, USA

web: wvi.org/

World Vision sponsors rehabilitation projects among the blind, deaf and paralyzed around the world. Often World Vision is able to provide direction and resources for local rehabilitation projects among the disabled. For more information contact:

World Vision International Liaison Office

6 Chemin de la Tourelle, 1209 Geneva, Switzerland

American Leprosy Mission

120 Broadus Ave.. Greenville, SC 29601, USA
Phone 800-543-3135

Salvation Army**International Headquarters**

101 Queen Victoria St., London EC4P 4EP, UK
Phone [44] (20) 7332 0101 (international) fax: [44] (20) 7236 4681 (international)

(b) International secular organizations serving people with disabilities

United Nations Global Programme on Disability

Two United Nations Plaza, DC2-1372, New York, NY 10017, USA
Facsimile: +1-212-963-0111
Email: enable@un.or

Disabled Peoples' International

748 Broadway, Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada R3G 0X3
Phone: (204) 783 8010 Fax: (204)783-6270
<http://www.dpi.org>

Mobility International, USA

P.O. Box 10767, Eugene, Oregon USA 97440
Phone: (541) 343-1284 (Tel/TTY), Fax: (541)343-6812
45 West Broadway, Suite 202, Eugene, Oregon USA 97401
<http://www.miusa.org>

World Institute on Disability

510 16th St., Suite 100, Oakland, CA 94612-1500, USA
Voice 510-763-4100, TTY: 510-763-4109
<http://www.wid.org>

International Disability and Development Consortium

c/o Handicap International,
Waterman House, 101-107 Chertsey Road, Woking, Surrey GU21 5BW5, UK
email: administrator@iddc.org.uk
Phone:+44 (0) 1252 821 429, fax: +44 (0) 1252 821 428

(c) Books and manuals

Forbes, Lewis. Disabled; A Move in the Right Direction. Antigonish, Nova Scotia: Eastwind Publications, 1980.

Jensen, Steve and Joni Tada. Friendship Unlimited. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1996.

Joni and Friends. Hearts in Motion Bible Study. Los Angeles, CA: Joni and Friends, 2001.

Miller, Steve. Through the Roof – A Guide to Assist Churches in Developing an Effective Disability Outreach. Los Angeles, CA: Joni and Friends, 1998.

Newman, Gene. All God's Children. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1984.

Werner, David. Disabled Village Children: A guide for community health workers, rehabilitation workers, and families. Palo Alto, CA: The Hesperia Foundation, 1987.

Disability Ministry Sunday Kit – This kit contains various tools including a tape, video, curriculum and instructions to help raise the level of disability awareness in your small church or Bible study class. The curriculum has a section for all ages. Contact Joni and Friends for more information.

9. PARTICIPANTS

Joni Eareckson Tada ,USA, Convenor
Jack S. Oppenhuizen, USA, Co-Convenor
Judy Butler, USA, Facilitator

First Name	Last Name	Country
William	Agbeti	Ghana
Damaris-Lidia	Ardelean	Romania
Gheorghe	Ardelean,	Romania
David	Bentley	US/Ukraine
Gesina	Blaauw	Netherlands/Albania/Malawi
Lucas	Colmenares	North Africa
Mariska	de Beer	South Africa
Noel	Fernandez	Cuba
Xianwei	Fu	China
Gabrielle	Geffe	France/Peru
Olga	Golovash	Kyrgyzstan
Nungu Magdalene	Manyi	Cameroon
Iosif	Malutan	Romania
Andrily	Pankyeyev	Ukraine
Careen	Peterson	USA
Nancy	Rayan	India
Prabhu	Rayan	India
Victor	Samuel	India
Oksana	Shulyak	Ukraine
Judy	Soares	USA
Carminha	Speirs	Brazil/Portugal
Ian R.	Speirs	UK/Portugal
Elizabeth Takury	Suavo	Peru
Marie Theresia	Swinters	Belgium
Judy	Swisher-Nunez	USA/Chile
Ken	Tada	USA
Eugeniusz	Trzcionkowski	Poland
Diana	Willis	New Zealand
Debora	Zayman	Nepal
Yan	Zhang	China