

2009 Children Desiring God National Conference
Standing on the Truth: Our Glorious God

Beyond Access: God's Delight in Disabilities
Presented by John P. Knight, Sr.

For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever.
Amen. Romans 11:36

Seminar Description:

Because God is good, some of his creation will live with a disability. Many hold the view that a good God would never purposefully create that kind of suffering for any of his creation. But God uses disabilities to point us toward himself. The purpose of this seminar is to explore specific references to disability in the Old and New Testaments that reveal God's glory and purposes in his creation. At the conclusion, participants will appreciate the significance of disability in the Bible, be familiar with themes on disability found in scripture, and see how disability consistently reveals the glory and goodness of God.

Seminar Outline:

- I. Welcome and Overview of Goals
 - a. God is glorious and good in all situations and at all times, including when he creates some to experience disability.
 - b. God is glorified when his people speak this truth to the next generation, using as the standard the words of the Bible rather than human experience.
 - c. God is glorified when his people behave in ways that demonstrate they trust God in all circumstances, including in how they serve those individuals who are living with a disability.
 - d. God is glorified when his people intentionally prepare all those in his church, able-bodied and those with disabilities, to use their gifts to proclaim his name, including preparation for leadership.
 - e. God is glorified when his people are "sorrowful, yet always rejoicing" and courageously go to the dark places where suffering people live.
- II. Significance of Disability
 - a. Statistics on Disability
 - i. Worldwide – ranges from 10 – 20% of population by country
 - ii. The Church – no reliable data; where does your church stand?
 - iii. The overwhelming connection of disability to abortion, abuse, social isolation and financial hardship
 - b. In the Bible - see attached
 - i. Appears in 40 of 66 books of the Bible

- ii. More than 350 verses with more than 440 references to disability or disease
 - c. On theologians
 - i. God-centered theology illuminates the Bible and shows clearly how God is glorified in all his creation
 - ii. Man-centered theology makes God impotent, incapable or unholy
 - d. On pastors, ministers, volunteers
 - i. Disability can inspire a church to deeper engagement with the Bible and with families who are experiencing disability, or
 - ii. Disability can create fear and defensiveness, which drives people away.
 - e. On individuals and families
 - i. God is good in all his ways and all his works
 - ii. God is for them through Jesus Christ
 - iii. God knows and understands – all is within his good and sovereign care
 - iv. Disability is for God’s glory and our good.
- III. Summary of God’s engagement with his creation
 - a. God is purposeful and intentional in creating all people, including those with disabilities
 - i. Psalm 139:13
 - ii. Exodus 4:11
 - iii. John 9:3
 - b. There is something much worse than disability: Matthew 5:29
- IV. Disability as ‘normal’ in the Bible
 - a. Why it is important that disability is ‘normal’ in the Bible
 - i. Disability has existed in every culture since the fall.
 - ii. Disability has always stood in contradiction to culture.
 - iii. Example to Christians and modern church.
 - iv. The Bible is relevant to people with disabilities and those in relationship with them.
 - b. Old Testament Overview
 - i. As is true today, the older one gets, the more likely one is to become disabled
 - 1. Isaac – Genesis 27:1
 - 2. Jacob – Genesis 48:10-11
 - ii. The young may experience disability as well: Mephibosheth – 2 Samuel 4:4
 - iii. People with disabilities can be very talented leaders: Naaman – 2 Kings 5
 - iv. God brings good news through the outcast: Lepers at Samaria – 2 Kings 7

- v. God wants all His children as part of the community and will effectively provide the means to make it happen, no matter the circumstance.

Jeremiah 31:8 Behold, I will bring them from the north country and gather them from the farthest parts of the earth, among them the blind and the lame, the pregnant woman and she who is in labor, together; a great company, they shall return here.

- c. New Testament Overview

- i. Friends and family should passionately advocate for individuals with disabilities

- 1. Mark 2: the 'paralytic' and his four friends
 - 2. Matthew 15:30: great crowds came to Jesus, 'bringing with them' people with various disabilities

- ii. Jesus spends time with people with disabilities who are on the fringes of society

- 1. Beggars: Mark 10, John 9
 - 2. Unable to be helped by doctors: Luke 8
 - 3. Alone and without help: John 5

- iii. Suffering is part of God's design for His glory

- 1. Jesus suffered
 - a. 1 Peter 3:18
 - b. Hebrews 2:9-10
 - 2. Paul suffered: Philippians 3:8-11
 - 3. We will suffer: Philippians 1:29-30
 - 4. All of creation is suffering: Romans 8:19-22
 - 5. God will sustain us: 1 Corinthians 1:4-8

- V. Is understanding God as sovereign over disability really that important?

- a. Without a proper understanding of the reliability of the Word of God and God's sovereignty, some theologians and pastors (and those who are learning from them) create their own understanding of the Bible rather than seeking to understand God's purposes.

- b. The result is culturally relevant but man-centered interpretations of the Word.

- c. For example: Kathy Black, [A Healing Homiletic: Preaching and Disability](#)

- 1. Assumes God is not sovereign. "Disability is part of everyday existence for millions of people and their loved ones in this world. Does God cause it to happen? No." p. 42.
 - 2. Assumes God is needy to achieve His purposes. "Interdependence acknowledges not only our dependence on God and one another, but also God's dependence on us to be agents of God's healing compassion in the world."
 - 3. Assumes God would only do those things judged as 'good' from a human perspective and would not do what is 'bad.' "Devastations, sufferings, frustrations, and disabilities

happen in this world. God does not cause them, but God is present in their midst to uphold us and transform us. Resurrection can happen in our lives without God causing the suffering and death *in order for* the resurrection to occur." P. 37

- d. Embracing God as sovereign and good requires deeper study, reflection, prayer and discernment. Not embracing God as sovereign over disability will lead people to hell.
- e. Consider the question: Does God discriminate against people with disabilities?
 - i. Jewish rabbi – “we just ignore those prohibitions”
 - ii. Leviticus 21:16-24: God is pointing us to His standard for a perfect priest in Leviticus 21 and an acceptable sacrifice in Leviticus 22. God is preparing the way for the Great High Priest without sinful imperfection, The Lamb of God without any blemish of guilt. Leviticus 21 is not about discrimination, denigration and disdain for those with disabilities. God is pointing us to the cross.

- VI. Conclusion: a good God creates people who will live with a disability
 - a. Typical in American culture, people ask how a good God could allow disability and suffering. It is the wrong question.
 - b. God is good, he purposes everything and everything is for His glory. Including disability.
 - i. John 1:1-3
 - ii. 2 Timothy 1:9
 - iii. Ephesians 1:3-6
 - iv. Romans 11:36

John P. Knight, Sr. and his wife, Dianne, are the parents of four children, including Paul who lives with multiple disabilities. John is Senior Director of Development at Desiring God and Chairs the Disability Committee at Bethlehem Baptist Church, where he and Dianne have been members since 1992. John has spoken on God's faithfulness to his family through disability and disease on two other occasions which can be found on the Internet:

- One Generation Shall Tell Your Works to Another (with David Michael) at <http://www.childrenofdesiringgod.org/events/conference2005.php>
- Bethlehem Baptist Church 2008 Men's Retreat at <http://www.hopeingod.org/Men.aspx>

John and other members of Bethlehem Baptist also contribute to a volunteer-led Disability Ministry blog at http://www.webjam.com/bbc_disability_ministry.

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Attachment One

References to Disease and Disability in the Bible

1. Method for Discovery and Organization:
 - a. English Standard Version Bible
 - b. BibleWorks software
 - c. Microsoft Excel

2. Overview of References I've Found to Disease and Disability in the Bible
 - a. 358 verses reference disease and disability 443 times
 - b. 40 of the 66 books of the Bible contain at least one reference
 - i. 24 books of the Old Testament have 275 references
 - Leviticus has the most in the OT with 97 references
 - ii. 16 books of the New Testament have 168 references
 - Matthew has the most in the NT with 46 references

3. List of Diseases and Disabilities
 - a. Blindness: more than 100 references
Includes blind, blindness, blinded, blinds, without sight, not see
 - b. Skin Diseases: more than 80
Includes leprosy, leprous, skin disease, scabs
 - c. Deaf: 28
Includes deaf, deafness, not hearing
 - d. Blemish: 70
 - e. Mobility impairment: 59
Includes lame, crippled, paralyzed, paralytic
 - f. Cognitive impairment: 9
Includes confuse, confusion, not understand, reason
 - g. Mental Illness: 12
Includes insane, madness, stupor
 - h. Mute: 24
 - i. Others:
Includes discharge, diseased feet, disabled, sickness, mutilated face, withered arm, withered hand, wasting disease