

Challenged by the Challenged



Laurie Evans and son, Duane Evans

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Jesus' purpose for coming to this earth was more than to endure the death penalty that sin had heaped on the human race. It included "bringing good news to the afflicted" (Isa. 61:1); breaking "every yoke" (Isa. 58:6), with a call "not to hide yourself from your own flesh" (Isa. 58:7). His ministry was all about caring for the marginalised of society—letting the oppressed go free; dividing your bread with the hungry; caring for the homeless poor (Isa. 58: 6, 7); looking after the orphans and widows in their distress (Js. 1: 27). The sensitive and compassionate way in which He interacted with the deaf, and vision impaired and persons with all manner of disabilities, is surely a challenge to the church and all Christians to reflect this same attitude.

One of the greatest misconceptions that can exist in the mind of a person is that disabilities of whatever kind are an indication of God's judgment on that person or the family. This is a myth that goes back to the earliest of times when Job's comforters sought to lay this guilt load onto him as if it were the cause for his terrible afflictions. In spite of his excruciating pain, and the fact that he could see no light at the end of a long, dark tunnel, he was able to affirm his integrity (Job 31) and proclaim in a voice that echoes on down through the centuries, "Though He slay me, yet will I hope in Him" (Job 13:15, NIV). Jesus, millennia later, affirmed the same truth when the disciples asked him about a man who could not see from birth: "Who sinned, this man or his parents, that he would be born blind?" (Jn. 9:2). His response was as clear as it was unequivocal. "It was neither that this man sinned, nor his parents; but it was so that the works of God might be displayed in him" (Jn. 9:3).

The reality is that sin affected and infected all of God's creation. The ground was cursed, the laws of nature took on a whole new dimension as illustrated at the time of the flood, and mankind was inflicted with mortality, which included a corruption of the natural laws for genetics and reproduction. It is a truism that just as the sun rises "on the evil and the good" and the rain falls "on the righteous and the unrighteous" (Matt. 5:45). So, while we continue to live on this planet, tragedies and misfortune are the lot of both the children of God and the children of this world. However, for the former group, there is the re-assuring promise by One whose word can be trusted: "In all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to His purpose" (Rom. 8:28).

The way we refer to people or groups of people within our society is usually done with the best of intentions, but it nevertheless often tends to influence the way we come to regard them. Labels like academics, innovators, leaders, self-starters, etc., conjure up a certain positive image in our minds of those kinds of people, while such terms as homeless, disadvantaged, illiterate and the like, tend to create a negative picture. "Disabled" is one such descriptor that can be a little demeaning, and it carries the connotation of being in some ways a "lesser person." A more affirming term would be "persons with disabilities." This first and foremost recognizes such people as "persons." They do not want special treatment; they want to be valued for who they are and treated as normal people who need to feel that they are in charge of their life and allowed to exercise their God given power of choice as much as circumstances allow.

Much of Jesus' teachings centered on the contribution people can make with their particular giftedness; visiting the sick, caring for those in prison, looking after the poor or giving a cup of cold water to the thirsty. People with disabilities are well placed to contribute to this kind of ministry, a ministry that Jesus highlighted as being a defining characteristic of His disciples (Matt. 25: 34–40). There is so much we can learn from these people. Most do not bare grudges, do not discriminate, and do not know the meaning of prejudice or racial discrimination. They have a great capacity, in a world of artificiality, to love without pretence and reveal the quality of love that Paul describes in 1 Corinthians 13: 4–6, that of being "patient, kind, not given to jealousy, bragging, displaying no arrogance, not acting unbecomingly, who keep no records of wrongs." These people possess the 'genuine product,' not some counterfeit home brand!

According to Scripture, stewardship involves the proper deployment of our

talents, which includes much more than material assets. It includes our influence: “Not one of us lives for himself, and not one dies for himself” (Rom. 14:7). It includes the time that we have been given: “We must work the works of Him who sent Me as long as it is day; night is coming when no one can work” (Jn. 9:4). It also includes the care we show others: “You shall love your neighbour as yourself” (Lev. 19:18). These, clearly, are part of the inventory that we all possess and it is incumbent on us to use these talents in a ministry to bless others. These “others” include persons with disabilities who are often the neglected of society, the overlooked and ignored who can contribute so much and yet in many cases receive so little. Our ministry to these precious people must begin by:

- Recognizing each as a person with needs similar to ours and whom God loves and made in His image;
- Treating them as equals and valuing the contribution that they can make in their own right;
- Not talking down to them but letting them think and act for themselves within the capacity that they possess.
- Affording them the opportunity to develop and grow within their respective capabilities and recognizing that each person is an individual.
- Including them in our social activities and making sure we include them in our conversations and interactions with others.
- Offering to provide hands on care, where the need exists, to give relief

to the family responsible for their welfare.

As a family who has been greatly enriched by having a son, Duane, with a disability I can testify to the joy and immeasurable pleasure and blessing that such persons bring with them into this world. We count it a privilege to be selected by heaven to care for one of His special people for whom He showed so much compassion, sensitivity and care. Duane’s radiant personality, generous spirit, spontaneous acceptance of all he comes into contact with and his loving heart has made us millionaires! If you want to add a dimension to your stewardship responsibilities that will return a blessing on you a hundredfold, take time and make the effort to reach out to persons with disabilities, and your life will never be the same again.

