

# HOT TOPIC

## Disability and the gospel Sunday 28 April 2024

### Introduction

- Aims
- Limitations
- Church Scene

#### DEFINITION

‘a physical or mental impairment that has a 'substantial' and 'long-term' negative effect on your ability to do normal daily activities’

#### UK Equality Act 2010

A physical, psychological, medical, or learning impairment that impacts a person's ability to undertake everyday tasks.

#### Oxford Dictionary, 2013

*An estimated 16.0 million people in the UK had a disability in 2021/22. This represents 24% of the total population... with disability prevalence up by 5 percentage [in the last decade].<sup>1</sup>*

---

<sup>1</sup> UK disability statistics: Prevalence and life experiences

## Models of understanding disability<sup>2</sup>

### Medical model

*Disability is an abnormal part of a normal world.*

This view focuses on overcoming impairments that a disabled person has to be able to participate fully in society.

### Social model

*Disability is a normal part of a normal world.*

This view focuses on removing unnecessary barriers which prevent disabled people participating in society.

### Towards a biblical model of disability?

*Disability, sadly, is an expected part of a fallen and broken world.*

In this view we see tragically all the world as broken, and part of this is seen in disabilities that people have. I'd suggest it leads to a realistic blend of both models and gives real hope for all in the gospel that breaks down barriers. We'll fill this model out following the gospel storyline.

### Structure

1. Creation
2. Fall
3. Salvation
4. New Creation

---

<sup>2</sup> *Same Lake, Different Boat*, Stephanie O. Hubach

# 1. Creation:

Mankind is made in the image of God.

*So God created mankind in his own image,  
in the image of God he created them;  
male and female he created them.*

**Genesis 1:27 (NIV 2011)**

All continue to bear God's image.

*Whoever sheds human blood, by humans shall their blood  
be shed; for in the image of God has God made mankind.*

**Genesis 9:6 (NIV 2011)**

*All men and women, being created in the image of God,  
have inherent and equal dignity and worth. Their greatest  
purpose is to obey, worship and love God.<sup>3</sup>*

*The image of God in humanity is not therefore a matter of  
relational or rational capacity, nor bodily autonomy,  
neither knowing nor acting, but being known by God as a  
royal child of God<sup>4</sup>*

All people are created equal.

*Praise God we live in a society that functionally believes this.*

It might be helpful to think that someone with a disability is:

**LIKE** me – they are also made in God's image and of great value in his sight;

**UNLIKE** me – they face additional challenges that I don't.

---

<sup>3</sup> FIEC Doctrinal Basis <https://fiec.org.uk/who-we-are/beliefs>

<sup>4</sup> *Evangelical Theology*, Michael F. Bird P752

## 2. Fall

We all now live in a broken world.

*So the Lord God banished him from the Garden of Eden to work the ground from which he had been taken. After he drove the man out, he placed on the east side of the Garden of Eden cherubim and a flaming sword flashing back and forth to guard the way to the tree of life.*

**Genesis 3:23-24 (NIV 2011)**

*For the creation was subjected to frustration... bondage to decay.... groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time."*

**Romans 8:20-22 (NIV 2011)**

Disability does display this.

*We are broken and weak in every arena of life: relationally, spiritually, physically, morally, and emotionally. The most difficult of these areas to hide is the physical.<sup>5</sup>*

Those with disabilities are not more sinful, but still sinful.

*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 works of God might be displayed in him.*

**John 9:2-3 (NIV 2011)**

*Could this be the root cause to why humanity has always seemingly been eager to hide disability and weakness? How could this affect the church?*

---

<sup>5</sup> *Disability & the Gospel*, Michael S. Beates

### 3. Salvation

Jesus' priority is spiritual wholeness first.

*When Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralyzed man, "Son, your sins are forgiven."*

**Mark 2:5 (2011 NIV)**

Salvation is a gift he can give to anyone he pleases.

*But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved...— and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God*

**Ephesians 2:4-5,8b (NIV 2011)**

*In what ways does Jesus willingly enter into disability on the cross?*

Christians are being conformed into Christ's' image.

*For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son*

**Romans 8:29a (NIV 2011)**

*Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day.*

**2 Corinthians 4:16 (NIV 2011)**

*Could disability be used in this process?*

*Aging with quadriplegia may be filled with extra challenges, but it doesn't demoralize me. With God's help, I hold everything lightly. I try not to grasp at my fragile life, nor coddle it or minimize my activities at Joni and Friends just because I'm getting older, growing weaker, and dealing with more pain. Rather, I find great comfort and joy in dying to self and living every day to serve the Lord*

*Jesus and others around the world whose disabilities are far more profound than mine.<sup>6</sup>*

## 4. New Creation

The future resurrection body is the hope for us all.

*So will it be with the resurrection of the dead. The body that is sown is perishable, it is raised imperishable; it is sown in dishonour, it is raised in glory; it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power; it is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body.*

**1 Corinthians 15:42-43 (NIV 2011)**

*And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Look! God's dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. 'He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death' or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away."*

**Revelation 21:3-4 (NIV 2011)**

*What is the now and not-yet of disability?*

## Concluding reflections

**The Bible is incredibly realistic with disability.**

**God is in the business of using what is weak in the world's eyes.**

*In declaring our innate inability and God's supreme ability as the giver of all good gifts, we can gather around us like-minded broken people and like-bodied broken people, together witnessing in a radically countercultural way that*

---

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/new-resolve-55-years-wheelchair/>, Joni Eareckson Tada

*when we are weak, he is strong, and then he receives the glory due to him alone*<sup>7</sup>

## The mystery of God's sovereign purposes in suffering and pain

*I have been shown that from disability God can create depend-ability the strength that comes from admitting my own weakness and depending on him who has all power. All of these lessons have been studied in the shadow of the cross-the greatest display of victory over disability and weakness the universe has ever beheld*<sup>8</sup>

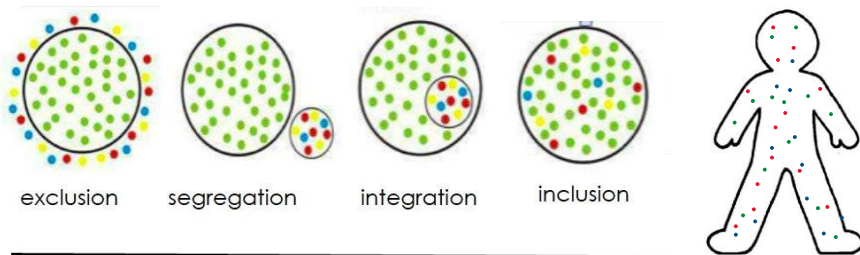
Now with the biblical and theological model of the gospel, we can ask how it will affect us as a church.

## Church Model

### 1. The church as a body

*Just as a body, though one, has many parts, but all its many parts form one body, so it is with Christ. .... The eye cannot say to the hand, "I don't need you!" And the head cannot say to the feet, "I don't need you!" On the contrary, those parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, and the parts that we think are less honourable we treat with special honour.*

**1 Corinthians 12:12, 21-23a (NIV 2011)**



<sup>7</sup> *Disability & the Gospel*, Michael S. Beates

<sup>8</sup> *Wrestling with an Angel*, Greg Lucas

*In a Christian community everything depends on whether each individual is an indispensable link in a chain. Only when even the smallest link is securely interlocked is the chain unbreakable. Every Christian community must realize that not only do the weak need the strong, but also that the strong cannot exist without the weak. The elimination of the weak is the death of fellowship.<sup>9</sup>*

*In a paradoxical way, the spiritual gift of presence in weakness by those with disabilities is the strength they bring to the church. They bring with that gift a more accurate self-realization of who we all are before God.*

## 2. The church as a banquet for all

*‘Go out quickly into the streets and alleys of the town and bring in the poor, the crippled, the blind and the lame.’*  
**Luke 14:21 (2011 NIV)**

### Books

*Same Lake, Different Boat*, Stephanie O. Hubach

*Disability & the Gospel*, Michael S. Beates

*Wrestling with an Angel*, Greg Lucas

*Joni* by Joni Eareckson Tada

*Like Me*, Laura Wifler (Author), Skylar White (Author) (Children’s book)

### Websites

<https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/god-make-her/>

<https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/welcoming-special-needs-families/>

[https://www.ombudsman.org.uk/sites/default/files/FDN-218144 Introduction to the Social and Medical Models of Disability.pdf](https://www.ombudsman.org.uk/sites/default/files/FDN-218144%20Introduction%20to%20the%20Social%20and%20Medical%20Models%20of%20Disability.pdf)

---

<sup>9</sup> *Life Together*, Dietrich Bonhoeffer