

## Challenging Issues

This is one of a series of booklets on challenging issues facing Christians today. It is written with the conviction that God's word the Bible is relevant and needs to be studied and applied sensitively.

# disability

One of a series of study guides to help Christians think through difficult issues in a helpful and informative way

# **Challenging Issues**

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## **Disability**

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**A Bible Study produced by  
The Social Issues and Resources Committee  
of the  
Presbyterian Church in Ireland**

# **Foreword**

This is one of a series of studies on Challenging Issues facing Christians today. It is written with the conviction that God's Word, the Bible, is relevant and needs to be studied and applied sensitively.

Our hope is that this series will help Christians to think through these difficult issues in a helpful and informative way.

**Norman AL Cameron**

**Convener of the Social Issues and Resources Committee**

# Introduction

Many disabled people seem to go through life excluded from so many experiences and opportunities that others take for granted. The purpose of this Bible study aid is to help examine our attitudes towards disability and those who are affected by it and to examine the guidance provided for us in the Scriptures.

Disability takes many forms and affects people in different ways. The same underlying condition can have little or no effect on one person's life, while severely limiting another's ability to live independently. It is clear that disability in one of its many forms has the potential to touch the life of every family and many individuals very deeply.

No one likes to admit to treating disabled people as inferior or second class, yet the way we behave towards them can give this message. We can unwittingly assume that a disabled person is less sensitive than others. For example, when we address the person who is pushing the wheelchair, rather than the person in the wheelchair, we devalue the occupant by giving the impression he or she does not understand, or does not wish to answer for themselves. When we expect a wheelchair user to sit out in the aisle of our church, even though we would never want to do the same, we seem to suggest that they are less sensitive than we are, simply because they are disabled. We are also implying, when we do this, that they have less right to be treated in the same way as we would wish to be treated.

There are many reasons why disabled people are treated as being 'different'. Ignorance may be a factor. If you have never experienced disability you may simply not understand what it is like not to be able to hold a fork properly, hear distinctly what is being said to you, or pull up your zip, or whatever.

A fear of embarrassment can affect how we treat disabled people. It is easier, and perhaps less embarrassing, to talk over the head of a deaf person to their friend, than to make the effort, or even display your own discomfort, by trying to communicate directly with them. Our failure to do this, however, can be very demeaning to the person with a hearing loss.

In less enlightened times some mental and physical disabilities were believed to be a punishment of God, or even the very presence of evil, and disabled people were treated accordingly. We have come a long way in our understanding of mental handicap, or learning disability, but is that enlightenment genuinely reflected in the way we relate to people? How often do you see a person with Down's Syndrome being humoured and talked down to, suggesting that they are of less value and that they have little to contribute to the lives of others? The Bible provides a great deal of guidance and inspiration about the purpose of life, about what it means to be made in the image of God and how we should treat those who are disabled.

# The relevance of Christian faith to disability

Our Christian faith gives direction for our attitudes and responses to people. The same principles apply to the person with a disability and to those relating to him or her.

The following questions and Biblical references can be used for discussion groups or personal study.

**Q**  
**1**

a. What does the Bible say about the meaning and purpose of our lives? (1 Corinthians 10v31; Revelation 7v15-17)

b. Is the meaning and purpose of the lives of people with a disability any different from that of non-disabled people?

**Q**  
**2**

There are different forms of disability – some have been present since birth, some come at later stages in life. What is one form of disability which we all have, and what are its identifying features? (Romans 8v22-23; Isaiah 59v2-3)

3

Identify attitudes which cause hurt and reduce the quality of life of persons with disability (e.g. of stereotyping, derogatory terminology, demeaning assumptions etc).

4

a. How does society rate "the worth" of people?

b. What does the Bible tell us about the worth of people? (Genesis 1v27; John 3v16; Matthew 10v28-31)

c. In what practical ways can Christians show their appreciation of the value of people including those with a disability?

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5

How does God instruct his people to respond to those who are marginalised by society? (Deuteronomy 15v11; Deuteronomy 26v12; Isaiah 1v17)

How did Jesus respond to the marginalised?

The Leper? (Matthew 8v2-3)

The blind man? (Matthew 9v27-30)

The mentally disturbed man? (Luke 8v26-35)

What lessons can be learnt from these examples?

6

We are told each member of Christ's body is important to the other members. In what unique ways can people with disability contribute to the lives of others?



Jesus said, "... whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me." (Matthew 25v37-40).

Why is it a privilege to serve others?



How can churches enable those with disability to feel and be a part of our church family? (e.g. access to facilities, involvement?)

## Summary of Relevant Points

- Each individual is important to and loved by God.
- Each has significance and a contribution to make to others.
- All can learn from each other's experiences.
- All have a calling in life.
- We have a particular responsibility towards those who are disadvantaged.
- God will judge our lives by our actions.
- There are practical steps to be taken to be inclusive of those with disability.
- Persons with disability have perceptions and insights without which others would be the poorer.
- Christians should set an example and have disability friendly churches and meetings.



# Reading List

“Look no hands”

(Publisher: Hodder & Stoughton)

Brian Gault

“Horizons of Home – Reality in Disability”

Brian H Edwards

(Publisher: Day One)

“Through the Roof – Roofbreaker Guides”

(Straightforward advice on how to make your church welcoming to disabled people.)

Available from:

Paul Dicken (Director)

Through the Roof

PO Box 178

COBHAM

Surrey

KT11 1YN

## Relevant Christian Organisations

**Evangelical Alliances’ Social Responsibility Department** publicises a directory of all UK groups involved in the Disability Network, 186 Kennington Park Road, London, SE11 4BT.

### **CHAD (Church Action on Disability)**

50 Scrutton Street, London, EC2A 4PH

(Education and Awareness raising of disability in churches.)

### **Hard Of Hearing Christian Fellowship**

PO Box 91, Reading, RG1 5YR

(Contact: Richard Livermore. Fellowship for hard of hearing Christians).

### **John Grooms Association For Disabled People**

50 Scrutton Street, London, EC2A 4PH

(Contact: Claire Stogden. Residential care of adults with physical and learning disabilities and accessible holidays).

### **Disabled Christians Fellowship**

213 Wick Road, Bristol, BS4 4HP

(Network of Christian Fellowship Groups also providing accessible holidays).

**Causeway Prospects**

10 Eaton Place, Reading, RG1 7LP  
(Working with adults with learning disabilities).

**Shaftesbury Society**

16 Kingston Road, London, SW19 1JZ  
(Residential and day care of adults with physical and learning disabilities).

**Torch Trust For The Blind**

Torch House, Hallaton Market, Harborough, Leicestershire, LE16 8UJ  
(Providing resources for blind and visually impaired people).

**Through The Roof**

PO Box 178, Cobham, Surrey, KT11 1YN  
(Training and raising disability awareness among Churches and Christians and equipping disabled people for leadership).





