

God in His tender mercy brings heart challenges to our ministries.

Disability has a way of stirring things up, in the heart and in the classroom.

Below are three major heart challenges when God brings a child with disabilities into your class.

1. Ministering to the Child with a Disability

- * Ask God to put His hand on your ministry and help you to bless this child.

- * Remember to ask God for wisdom.

- * Model patience and prayer.

- * Ask parents for advice on caring for their child.

- * Don't try to guess or assume a diagnosis.

- * Learn what you can about a child's disability.

- * It may be helpful to recruit a helper to work with a child.

- * Like all people, those with disabilities are sinners and in need a Savior.

2. Ministering to the Family of the Child

- * Parents of disabled children are blessed when the body of Christ reaches out and loves and accepts them and their child.

- * Take the time to ask parents about their life and how you can pray for them.

- * Don't give advice to families about caring for their child.

- * Families living with disability often struggle a great deal with intense day to day challenges. People who are hurting have a tendency to draw inward. True ministry draws the hurting outward and toward Christ.
- * Disability can become all-consuming in a family.
- * Helping people see life from an eternal perspective is a critical role of the church.
- * Seek to get to know families and pray for them. Also meet some practical needs so that they are able to be a part of the body of Christ.
- * It is important for parents of a child with disabilities to be able to go to church and be filled so that they can return home refreshed.

3. God's Work in the Hearts of the Team and the Typical Children in the Classroom

- * This child is with you for a God-ordained purpose.
- * God wants you to find out what pleases Him and do it.
- * God works in the hearts and attitudes of volunteers through disability.
- * Some are not called to work directly with a child with disabilities.
- * God works in the hearts of typical children as they see others model love for people with disabilities.

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Our role in ministry is to help people grow a tender, unshakable love for Christ. God gives us tough situations that seem hard, but in fact, they are merciful.

Disability Resources

Books about God, Suffering, and Disability

A Lifetime of Wisdom—Embracing the Way God Heals You by Joni Eareckson Tada

Wrestling with an Angel—A Story of Love, Disability and the Lessons of Grace by Greg Lucas

Disability Ministry Resources

Exceptional Teaching—A Comprehensive Guide for Including Students with Disabilities by Jim Pierson

Same Lake Different Boat—Coming Alongside People Touched by Disability by Stephanie O. Hubach

Joni and Friends Website www.joniandfriends.org

Resources Specifically About Autism

Autism and Your Church—Nurturing the Spiritual Growth of People with Autism Spectrum Disorders by Barbara J. Newman

Finding Your Child's Way on the Autism Spectrum—Discovering Unique Strengths, Mastering Behavior Challenges by Dr. Laura Hendrickson

Too Wise to Be Mistaken, Too Good to Be Unkind by Cathy Steere

The Unexpected Gift by Michelle Schreder

Temple Grandin (DVD – PG) This movie is a true story of an autistic woman who is a top scientist in the livestock handling industry. It is especially helpful for understanding some of the sensory issues and struggles adapting to social situations associated with autism.

Joni and Friends Television ~ episodes 30 and 31 ~ “Making Sense of Autism” (Both episodes are available for viewing online: <http://www.joniandfriends.org/television/making-sense-autism-part-1/> <http://www.joniandfriends.org/television/making-sense-autism-part-2/>)