

What do you think of when we use the word disability?

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# What is disability?

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A disability is any condition of the body or mind (impairment) that makes it more difficult for the person with the condition to do certain activities (activity limitation) and interact with the world around them (participation restrictions).



There are many types of disabilities, such as those that affect a person's:

- Vision
- Movement
- Thinking
- Remembering
- Learning
- Communicating
- Hearing
- Mental health
- Social relationships



According to the World Health Organization, disability has three dimensions:<sup>1</sup>

**Impairment** in a person's body structure or function, or mental functioning; examples of impairments include loss of a limb, loss of vision or memory loss.

**Activity limitation**, such as difficulty seeing, hearing, walking, or problem solving.

**Participation restrictions** in normal daily activities, such as working, engaging in social and recreational activities, and obtaining health care and preventive services.



Disability can be from birth, or by injury, developmental, a longstanding condition, or progressive.



# Limitation to activities and participation

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- Learning and applying knowledge
- Managing tasks and demands
- Mobility (moving and maintaining body positions, handling and moving objects, moving around in the environment, moving around using transportation)
- Managing self-care tasks
- Managing domestic life
- Establishing and managing interpersonal relationships and interactions
- Engaging in major life areas (education, employment, managing money or finances)
- Engaging in community, social, and civic life





One in four American  
adults has a **disability**.\*

\*2016 Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System (BRFSS)

Do you have  
a disability?

**Many of us have or will have a  
disability at some point in our lives.**

ADHD?

Learning disability?

Difficulty hearing?

Do you wear glasses?

Knees or hips not working like they use to?

Memory loss?

Dexterity issues?

Broke a bone?

Sensory issues?





Those of us  
without  
impairment  
are just  
*“temporarily  
able-bodied.”*

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*“We come into the world completely dependent on others and, if we are blessed to live long enough, we will exit the world increasing, if not completely, dependent on others.”*

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*--from The Bible and Disability, A  
Commentary*

## All human beings have limitations

- “Is disability really something that is limiting?”
- “Is not disability something that God has created in order to build a plural, and richer world?”
- “Is not disability a gift from God rather than a limiting condition with which some persons have to live?”

“We affirm that God loves all disabled people and extends to all the opportunity to respond to that love. We believe that *every* disabled person has the opportunity to find peace with God”

\* Taken from A Church of all and for All—  
World Council of Churches, 2003

# *How is disability treated in the Bible?*

We are made in the image of God—Gen 1:27

“So God created humankind according to his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them”

***If we are created in God’s image, does that mean God looks like us?***

“...but my epiphany bore little resemblance to the God I was expecting or the God of my dreams. I saw God in a sip-puff wheelchair, that is, the chair used mostly by quadriplegics enabling them to maneuver by blowing and sucking on a straw-like device....I beheld God as a survivor, unpitying, and forthright. I recognized the incarnate Christ in the image of those judged “not feasible,” “unemployable,” with “questionable quality of life.” Here was God for me. – Nancy L. Eiesland from **The Disabled God: Toward a Liberatory Theology of Disability**

Or...”God’s creation of human beings according to the image of God means that God has created the human being in order to be in relationship.” 1

Perhaps, it is more about our ability to know and love. As we learn to love, we become more like God.

“It is even suggested there is a sharing of common traits between God and humanity. Humanity, as the representative image of God, has sometimes experienced disability. God includes disability.” ...2

1. Walter Brueggeman, 1997
2. Sarah Melcher, The Bible and Disability, 2017

“All creation is interrelated, and gifts are shared among God’s various creatures. The relationship among the ~~various human beings~~--- people with disabilities, caregivers, neighbors, and others---can look to Genesis 1 as offering a model for interrelationship.”

---Sarah J Melcher, *The Bible and Disability*, 2017





# The Biblical Laws

- The laws in Leviticus make up the main system of ability and disability within the Hebrew Bible. Many of these laws are kept even today.
- In the Bible people with disabilities were seen as outcasts, mostly due to the Levitical laws. Anyone who did not meet the Law was rebuked and not allowed into the temple.
- “Legal uncleanness was attached to the disabled...The disabled had the status of prostitutes or of women whom menstruation made unclean.” This was considered a “ritual impairment”. \*
- Many of these laws remind us that disability is a social construct and judgement made by culture.
- And yet, God did not hesitate to use people, like Moses, according to God’s purpose.

\* *The Bible and Disability, A Commentary*

# My Body Is Not A Prayer Request

## Disability Justice in the Church

Amy Kenny

“The Hebrew people understood **goodness** to be located between things. As a result, the original hearers would have understood **goodness** to refer to the ties and relationships between things in creation.”

“Goodness happens when the betweenness is restored. Without supporting our neighbor’s flourishing, we are missing out on the vehement goodness of creation.”

“We all have God’s image—regardless of how smart we are, how much we “contribute to society”, how our bodies function, or what we believe.”

## Fallacies about being disabled

"We are not seeking to fix our neighbor's physical impairment, but to generate a world that does not encumber our neighbor for that impairment."

- You must have sinned.
- Your parents must have sinned.
- Fixing a disability by "praying it away"
- Your disability is the result of the fall.
- God needed a special angel.
- You just need to have a little more faith and you could be healed.

# Disability as a blessing

- When telling stories from the Bible we tend to omit disabilities of Moses, Paul, Jacob, Sarah, Hannah, Samson...
- Yet, God uses people throughout the Bible regardless of their abilities.
- “Disability acts as a *blessing*, a *revelation*, and a *prophetic witness* to the community. It even becomes a mark of the covenant for Jacob, who becomes disabled as a result of wrestling with God. His limp becomes a reminder of the transformative encounter.”<sup>1</sup>

1. Amy Kenny, My Body is Not A Prayer Request

*“Disability is more than wheelchairs and braille. It’s a way of understanding the world by disrupting categories of normalcy. It’s a way of discovering the beautiful biodiversity that God has woven throughout the tapestry of creation.”*

*--Amy Kenny*



My friend, Charlie







