

# LENT 4 SERMON NOTES AND DISCUSSION GUIDE

## SUFFERING AND HOPE



## PT 4. DELVING INTO DISABILITY

### WELCOME

Tell us about a time you were injured. **AND / OR** Tell us one of your weaknesses.

### AN INTRODUCTION TO THE TOPIC OF DISABILITY

1 in 5 Australians have at least one disability:

- 3.4 million Australians have a physical disability.
- 0.7 million have an intellectual impairment.
- 0.4 million have vision impairment.
- 2.0 million Aussies suffer dyslexia.
- 3.6 million Aussies have some hearing loss.

Almost 90 per cent of disabilities are not visible. [Source: Australian Network On Disability [www.and.org.au](http://www.and.org.au)]

Disability is a personal topic. Some may not openly admit they live with disability. But if we live long enough it is almost certain that we will suffer disability of some kind. Although we shouldn't get hung up about being politically correct all the time how we talk still does matter.

Discuss:

- Why is this topic hard for some of us to discuss? (And it is OK if it is!)
- Is there anything you'd like to say before we launch into a discussion on disability?

## AN EXPERIENCE WITH DISABILITY

Pastor Matt and Karryn write... When Karryn was pregnant with Ben we knew he was a boy. We already had dreams about who he would be. We imagined he would be strong, witty, musical, intelligent and fun. Long before he came we had chosen a name that represented all our dreams: Benjamin Robert Thiele. Karryn describes his birth as a very scary two days – her life was under grave threat and so was Ben's. He came five weeks premature. As soon as he was born the doctor said to a nurse, 'he has unusual hands - get the paediatrician.' (This was code for 'Down Syndrome Baby' but we didn't know). Our new baby was rushed out of the room and Matt followed. After a while the doctors all came back in with Matt. They gave the child to me (Karryn) and told me that he had Down Syndrome. In the following days I felt shock, rejection, embarrassment. I asked 'what did I do wrong?' I felt alone because the baby was in the Neonatal Ward and Matt was busy making calls. I felt grief and fear and longing for my child. But Ben was terribly sick and hanging between life and death – with multiple life-threatening health conditions – I could not hold him. Matt felt shame and questioned his manhood – typical bloke stuff! But we both realised that we had to love this child for *who he was*, not who we wanted him to be. So we committed an act of radical acceptance. On his third day of life we renamed Ben. We named him after a man who had inspired us - a great football coach - a Queenslander who has the most beautiful relationship with his disabled children. We renamed him Benjamin BENNETT Thiele. This symbolises what we want for Ben – to love him in the way Wayne Bennett loves his children!

Discuss: What does this story bring up for you? Where do you see God in this story?

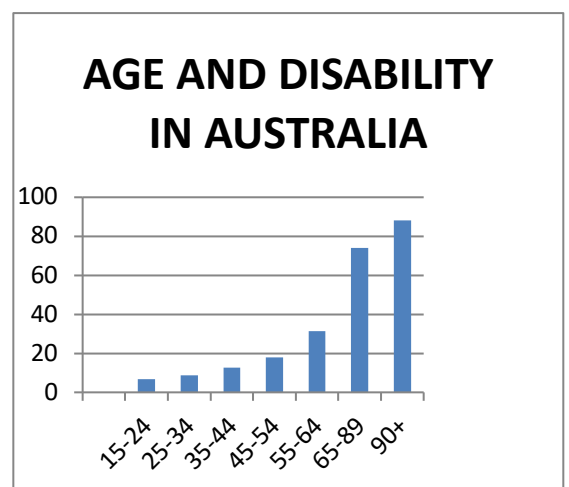
## PEOPLE WITH DISABILITY IN THE BIBLE

What is concealed in the Old Testament is revealed in the New Testament. In Old Testament there is some negativity about disability. But Jesus changes everything. God's grace for the disabled is sometimes concealed in the Old Testament but is fully revealed in the New Testament!

## ISAAC: BLIND WITH AGE

In old age Isaac could not see his two sons Jacob and Esau to tell them apart. Because of his disability he was tricked and taken advantage of. Read and discuss the story...

*Genesis 27:18-24. "Which one of my sons are you?" his father asked. Jacob replied, "I am Esau, your first-born, and I have done what you told me. Please sit up and eat the meat I have brought. Then you can give me your blessing." Isaac asked, "My son, how did you find an animal so quickly?" "The LORD your God was kind to me," Jacob answered. "My son," Isaac said, "come closer, where I can touch you and find out if you really are Esau." Jacob went closer. His father touched him and said, "You sound like Jacob, but your hands feel hairy like Esau's." And so Isaac blessed Jacob, thinking he was Esau. Isaac asked, "Are you really my son Esau?" "Yes, I am," Jacob answered.*



Having a disability can make you vulnerable to being taken advantage of. And ageing means you are likely to acquire disability. There are two kinds of disability – those we are born with, and those we acquire along the way. 4000+ years ago it was the same. The Bible records the sad story of how those with disability get used by others. How can we challenge this?

## JACOB: LIVING WITH A GOD-GIVEN LIMP

Like his father Jacob seems to have acquired a disability. Jacob lived a life of trickery (can you recall some of his tricks?). One night Jacob was about to face the consequences of his trickery. The next day he would meet his fate. So Jacob stayed awake and wrestled with God in prayer...

*Genesis 32:22-31. <sup>22-23</sup>Jacob got up in the middle of the night and took his wives, his eleven children, and everything he owned across to the other side of the Jabbok River for safety. <sup>24</sup>Afterwards, Jacob went back and spent the rest of the night alone. A man came and fought with Jacob until just before daybreak. <sup>25</sup>When the man saw that he could not win, he struck Jacob on the hip and threw it out of joint. <sup>26</sup>They kept on wrestling until the man said, "Let go of me! It's almost daylight." "You can't go until you bless me," Jacob replied. <sup>27</sup>Then the man asked, "What is your name?" "Jacob," he answered. <sup>28</sup>The man said, "Your name will no longer be Jacob. You have wrestled with God and with men, and you have prevailed. That's why your name will be Israel." <sup>29</sup>Jacob said, "Now tell me your name." "Don't you know who I am?" he asked. And he blessed Jacob. <sup>30</sup>Jacob said, "I have seen God face to face, and I am still alive." So he named the place Peniel <sup>31</sup>The sun was coming up as Jacob was leaving Peniel. He was limping because he had been struck on the hip...*

This is not a simple kids story. It is full of deep Hebrew symbolism. For instance we discover here what the name 'Israel' actually means! This account is a powerful picture of prayer. What does this story say to you about prayer?

Read and discuss what Barry Chant has to say about Jacob's limp...

*"The Old Testament hero Jacob's experience is representative of all the servants of God. In the story of his return home to face his brother Esau, the Scripture tells how he sent his family and gifts ahead of him, while he lingered at the brook of Jabbok, apparently to contemplate his strategy... Jacob's limp was evidently permanent (cf. Hebrews 11:21). Every time Jacob walked, his limp reminded him of his dependency on God. It seems that at some point in life everyone who God uses experiences an encounter which leaves them 'crippled'. This is normally an experience of suffering or pain. God's true servants always walk with a limp." - Barry Chant, Walking With A Limp, Pg25-26.*

## MOSES: SPEECH IMPEDIMENT

Remember the story of Moses? Recap if you need to! In the movies Moses says "Let my people go" with power. But he may have mumbled or stuttered the words at best!

*Exodus 3:10,4:10*

*God said, "Now go to the king! I am sending you to lead my people out of his country." ... Then Moses told the LORD, "Please, LORD, I'm not eloquent. I never was in the past nor am I now since you spoke to your servant. In fact, I talk too slowly and I have a speech impediment." (ISV)*

Jewish Rabbi Nissim Ben Reuben said: *"Had Moses been an eloquent speaker, there would always be room for skeptics to claim that the Jewish people accepted God's law only as a result of Moses' charisma. After all, a glib, captivating speaker can convince people of almost anything. But it was actually a challenge to listen to Moses. This makes it clear that we did not accept God's law because we were wowed by Moses; we accepted the Torah because of God."*

What do you think of the Rabbi's insight?

## **BARTIMAEUS: EVERYONE TOLD HIM TO SHUT UP EXCEPT JESUS!**

*Mark 10:46-69. Then they came to Jericho. As Jesus and his disciples, together with a large crowd, were leaving the city, a blind man, Bartimaeus (which means "son of Timaeus"), was sitting by the roadside begging. When he heard that it was Jesus of Nazareth, he began to shout, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!" Many rebuked him and told him to be quiet, but he shouted all the more, "Son of David, have mercy on me!" Jesus stopped and said, "Call him."*

Reflect quietly on this story. Then discuss what you have noticed or heard.

## **CELIDONIUS: THE ONE WHO JESUS WOULD NOT BLAME**

*John 9:1-3. As he went along, he saw a man blind from birth. 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."*

Reflect quietly on the following then discuss what you are hearing.

No one knows his name but in tradition Christians have called him 'Celidonius'. The disciples sought the cause for his blindness. They blamed him. But Jesus saw his potential to glorify God. When everyone else would blame this blind man Jesus would not. Sometimes when disability occurs we look for someone to blame. But Jesus looks to something bigger. What is that?

## **THE PEOPLE AT YOUR FEAST**

Luke has a special love for the poor and those with disability. He mentions many things Jesus said about them. When Luke records Jesus' first ever preaching it starts with disability (Luke 4:16-21).

*Luke 14:12-14. Then Jesus said to his host, "When you give a luncheon or dinner, do not invite your friends, your brothers or sisters, your relatives, or your rich neighbours; if you do, they may invite you back and so you will be repaid. But when you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, and you will be blessed."*

*Luke 14:21. Then the owner of the house [symbolises God] ordered his servant, 'Go out quickly into the streets and alleys of the town and bring in the poor, the crippled, the blind and the lame.'*

Reflect on the above words of Jesus and discuss what they mean to you.

## **PAUL: WITH A THORN THAT KEPT HIM WEAK**

*2 Cor. 12:7-9. So to keep me from becoming conceited because of the surpassing greatness of the revelations, a thorn was given me in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to harass me, to keep me from becoming conceited. Three times I pleaded with the Lord about this, that it should leave me. But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness."*

Paul's disability kept him reliant on God. It ensured that Paul didn't tell us how great he was. But instead Paul told us how loving God is! People of disability can teach us. They teach us what it means to be truly human. They teach us what love really is. They strip away all pretension. They get us back to basics. They show us that the love of God is greater and closer than we thought.

What have you learnt from people with disability?