

DISABILITY AWARENESS SEMINAR

by

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Theme: How to help congregations become more effective in ministry to those who are disabled or impaired.

Setting: The following seminar is adaptable for adults or for use as a multigenerational experience in a variety of settings. It is suitable for a church retreat, a family camp, a Sabbath afternoon presentation, a family enrichment seminar, etc. There are a number of separate components in the seminar. You can select what suits the particular needs of your church situation. **Presentation Helps** are provided for the leader(s), and group exercises and other handouts are found at the end of the materials.

Note: The terminology for disability varies from country to country. The appropriate terms also change from time to time. Be sensitive to the use of correct terms. Choose the words that best suit your needs and the group you are teaching. Be aware that disability is a topic that can evoke very strong feelings. Although the activities in this seminar are meant to be enjoyable, as well as learning experiences, be careful that disability is not trivialised or patronized.

Seminar Materials:

[Activity Sheet # 1 Discussion Questions](#)

[Activity Sheet # 2 Deafness](#)

[Activity Sheet # 3 Blindness](#)

[Activity Sheet # 4 Being in a Wheelchair](#)

[Activity Sheet # 5 Partial Paralysis](#)

[Activity Sheet # 6 Dyspraxia](#)

[Activity Sheet # 7 Star Pattern](#)

[Handout #1 Draw a Picture](#)

[Handout #2 Ideas for Relating to People With a Disability](#)

[Transparency #1 Draw a Picture](#)

[Transparency #2 Draw a Picture Discussion](#)

Preparation:

- Make copies of handouts as indicated in the materials list.
- Prepare overhead transparencies.
- Make multiple copies of the Star Pattern sheets, since this is a popular activity.
- Gather other materials for the disability experiences (see instructions for each activity). Copies of activity sheets #2 - 6 may be given to each participant or one copy may be placed at each "disability" station.
- Have a supply of pencils and scrap paper available.

PRESENTATION HELPS

Introduction

We know from the Scriptures that Jesus spent much of His time healing people. In fact He spent much more time healing people and ministering to their physical needs than He spent preaching to them! This was His way of showing God's love to a broken and hurting world.

During His ministry Jesus devoted more time to healing the sick than to preaching. His miracles testified to the truth of His words, that He came not to destroy but to save. . . . As He passed through the towns and cities He was like a vital current, diffusing life and joy wherever He went. (*The Desire of Ages*, p. 350)

Jesus said, "I am come that they may have life and have it to the full" (John 10:10). There were "whole villages where there was not a moan of sickness in any house; for He had passed through them, and healed all their sick" (*The Desire of Ages*, p. 241).

Thinking About Disability

Let us try to understand a little of what it could be like to be disabled in some way.

Exercise: Draw a Picture ([Handout #1](#)). Distribute a copy of the handout to each seminar participant or use plain paper and [Transparency #1](#) to display the exercise directions. Make sure everyone understands the instructions. Children who can read and write can also enjoy this exercise. Allow a few minutes for each person to do the exercise. When everyone has finished the task, invite participants to exchange pictures.

When all the pictures have been exchanged, ask everyone to carefully alter the drawing they now have in front of them with a disability or illness of some sort. Indicate the disability by scribbling over the eyes to show blindness, or scribbling over a limb to show that the limb no longer works, or has been amputated. Or write the name of an illness on the picture. Try to think of an illness or disability that will likely be familiar to the owner of the picture.

Return the picture to its owner and reclaim your own picture. Look at your picture. Check with each other to be sure you fully understand the disability you have been given. Think about the disability. How will this disability affect your life? Which of the things that you wrote around your picture would no longer be possible? Which things would be very difficult to do? Which things could you still enjoy doing? Are there new things that you would like to do with your life now that it has been changed by the disability? Think of at least one good thing that could come out of your disability.

Be quiet for a while and think about these questions, then jot down your ideas around your picture or on the back of the paper. When you have finished, find the person with whom you exchanged pictures and discuss the following points (See [Transparency #2](#)).

- If it happened today, my disability would change my life by . . .
- My disability would change my plans for the future in these ways . . .
- The kind of support and help I would want to have from other people would be . . .

Discuss as a large group what this experience was like and what you have learned. *Debriefing activity.* It is important to debrief the group since the preceding exercise is likely to have been a thought-provoking and emotional experience.

Ask the group members to close their eyes and imagine themselves, with the disability they were given during the drawing activity, sitting and begging by a street in a village in Israel during the time of Jesus' ministry. Imagine Jesus walking by and noticing you. He speaks to you for a minute or two. What do you think He would have said to you? Then He touches you and instantly you are healed! The illness or disability which your self-portrait was given is gone forever! You are strong and fully able once more! You jump up and praise God! Think how you would respond to Jesus in this situation. Think how your healing would have changed your life and the life of your family and friends.

Discussion groups. Divide into groups of eight or less and give each group one of the following questions to discuss for a few minutes (See [Activity Sheet #1 Discussion Questions](#)):

- As a church we often spend much time preaching and teaching. How can we balance this with practical service in our local communities and among people with special needs, as Jesus did?
- Is it possible that we feel more comfortable as a church helping people who are in difficulty because they practice an unhealthy lifestyle (tobacco, alcohol, drugs, obesity) rather than helping those who did not choose their illness or disability? If so, why?
- If Jesus came through our town today, where would He go to find people who needed help, comfort and healing?
- Jesus was happy to touch and heal the lepers in His day. How do we feel about the AIDS sufferers of our day? What would Jesus say to them and do for them? How can we help them "have life, and have it to the full"?
- When wanting to help people with disabilities and illnesses today, what are some special challenges we might face?
- "So God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them" (Genesis 1:27 RSV). What does it mean that we are all made in God's image? How does the fact that we are all made in the image of God affect the way we relate to people with illness and disability? How can we learn to see the image of God in each person with whom we relate?

Experience a 'Disability' Activities

The following activities are designed to help seminar participants understand more about deafness, blindness, being in a wheelchair, partial paralysis, and dyspraxia. Ideally, these activities would be set up around a room, or in several different rooms, where people are free to wander about and try the different experiences for themselves. Divide into five groups and take about five minutes at each activity station. Come together as a group after about thirty minutes of these activities and talk openly about your experiences and what you have all learned. An alternate plan on a smaller scale would be to have volunteers come to the front of the seminar to try the different activities. Each could be interviewed regarding their experience with the activity.

Deafness ([Activity Sheet #2](#)).

Materials required: Several sets of ear-plugs.

Instructions: Find a partner. Each insert the ear plugs and then try to have a conversation together.

Share: How does it feel?

Read and discuss: Mark 7:31-37. The deaf man in this story had friends who cared for him. Why do you think Jesus put His fingers in the man's ears and then spat and touched his tongue? How did the man and his friends feel when he had been healed?

Blindness ([Activity Sheet #3](#)).

Materials required: Blindfolds or scarves; pitcher of water and a glass; several potatoes and a vegetable peeler; complete sets of place settings, including glasses and table napkins; paper and

pencil.

Instructions: Have a friend blindfold you and watch over you to keep you safe as you try one or more of the following activities. When you have completed them, exchange places with your partner.

- Pour a glass of water from the jug.
- Set a place setting at the table.
- Peel a potato.
- Walk around the room and out of the door.
- Write out your favorite text.

Share: How did your experience of blindness make you feel?

Read and discuss: Matthew 20:29-34. Talk about how these men felt, about how the crowd treated them, and about how Jesus treated them.

Being in a wheelchair ([Activity Sheet #4](#)).

Materials required: Wheelchair(s). (These may be rented from a local medical supply store or you may try to borrow one from a local hospital.)

Instructions: Sit in the wheelchair. Try maneuvering the chair yourself. Have a friend push you around the church or building. Try opening doors and entering rooms. Notice how the wheelchair limits your freedom. Discover what it is like to try get from one floor to another or to use the toilet. Can you see in the mirrors, reach the sinks and the hand towels, etc.?

Share: How did it feel to try to maneuver the wheelchair yourself? How did it feel to be pushed? How easy was it to get through the doors in the building? What other challenges and problems did the building present to you? If the wheelchair was electric self-propelled, how did that feel? What new problems did that pose?

Read and discuss: Mark 2:1-12. Although this man was not in a wheelchair, he could not walk and he had to depend on his friends to carry him around. Today he would probably be using a wheelchair. Think about how his friends treated him. Think about how the rulers of the day treated him. How must it have felt when he was healed? Discuss what you think about his life before and after his healing.

Partial paralysis ([Activity Sheet #5](#))

Paralysis of one side of the body, as in a stroke (hemiplegia).

Materials required: Potatoes; peeler(s); scissors; pencils; drawing paper; bread; butter; knives; paper plates; a small tablecloth.

Instructions: Sit on one hand or hold it behind your back. Try using your preferred hand and then your non-preferred hand and observe the difference. Then, using only one hand, try one or more of the following:

- Peel a potato.
- Cut a shape out of a piece of paper (i.e., draw around a plate; then try to cut out the circle).
- Tie shoelaces using only one hand.
- Spread a slice of bread and butter.
- Find your favorite text in the Bible and then copy it onto a piece of paper using your non-preferred hand.
- Fold the tablecloth neatly to fit into a drawer.

Share: Tell what it was like to undertake normal tasks, but with only the use of one hand or your less-preferred hand. What were your feelings (loneliness, anxiety, sadness, frustration, fear, anger, etc.)? Discuss what it would be like to try to crack an egg, strain vegetables, roll pastry dough, use a telephone, iron a shirt, bathe yourself, put on a pullover sweater, tie a necktie.

Read and discuss: Luke 6:1-11. The man with a withered hand would have had to perform tasks with only one hand. How do you think he felt when Jesus healed him? How did the Pharisees feel about this healing? In what ways might we bring the spirit of Jesus, if not physical healing, to the life of a disabled or impaired person? What good can we do on the Sabbath to be a blessing to such individuals in our communities?

Dyspraxia ([Activity Sheet #6](#))

Dyspraxia is a condition in which mind-body coordination breaks down, making it difficult to perform everyday tasks. You know what you want to do, but it's very hard to coordinate your body to cooperate with your intentions.

Materials required: A table; a free-standing table mirror with dimensions approximately 12" by 18"; copies of the star pattern ([Activity Sheet #7](#)); pencils; a sturdy cardboard box approximately 12" on each dimension. The ends of the box should be removed (or folded inside to make the box more rigid and stable).

Instructions: Stand the mirror up on the table (lean it against a wall or otherwise prop it up) with the reflective side toward you. Place the cardboard box on the table so that one end is open toward the mirror and one end is open toward the front of the table. Lay one of the star patterns down flat on the table inside the box. Adjust the box and the mirror so that, when you are standing with the box between you and the mirror, you can see the star pattern reflected in the mirror, but you are unable to see the star in the box (See diagram). Now take a pencil and, looking only into the mirror, draw a line between the two border lines of the star. Trace all the way around the star.

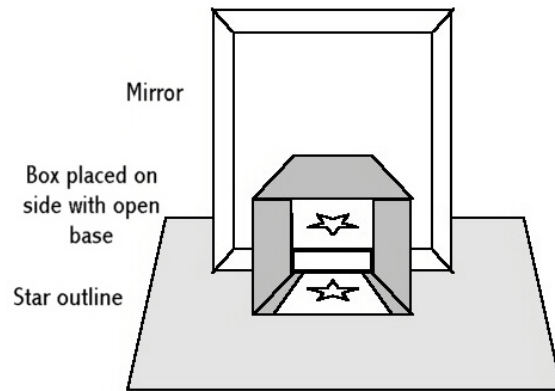


Diagram: Space the mirror a few inches behind the box, so you can see the reflected image of the star in the mirror, but not your hands or the star outline inside the box.

Share: How does this feel? Frustrating? Bewildering? How would you feel if every task you faced in your life felt the same way as this?

The Reality of Our Own "Disability"

We may have never considered ourselves disabled because we are free of physical problems or illnesses. However, none of us will reach our full potential this side of heaven. We each have some part of us which is hurting or broken or somehow impaired. This could be a paralyzing fear, uncontrolled anger, painful memories, or other personal challenges. Think about a disability of this type that you may have.

We may also have spiritual disabilities. To our natural hard-of-spiritual-hearing state in which we have difficulty discerning the loving voice of God because of our natural sinful nature, we may also have acquired additional "deafness" through the choices we have made and the circumstances through which we have passed. For instance, we are often blind to the eternal consequences of our actions. We are "half hearted" in our relationship and our service to God. At times, the pain of some abuse in the past may prevent us from understanding God's will for our lives today.

The good news is that Jesus wants us all to be whole. He loves us even though we are naturally bent against Him. He would love to walk among us today and heal each of us, whatever our problems may be. It is not His will that any of us function short of our potential in our lives on this earth. He longs for the day when He can restore us all completely to wholeness.

Prayer partners. Find a partner and pray together. Pray that God will help you as you relate to people with various disabilities and pray for each other's "disabilities." Whether you choose to share your personal "disability" with each other or not, pray nonetheless for God's healing and

help in the challenging situations you both face. Pray for those whom you know in your family, your church, and your community who are enduring the difficulties both physical and emotional disabilities bring. Pray that you will be guided in thinking of ways to minister to and relate to the people with impairments in your church and community.

Making A Difference Here And Now

Distribute [Handout #2](#) *Ideas for Relating to People With a Disability*. Brainstorm ways in which your church could make changes, even if the changes are small and few, to enable people with disabilities to feel welcome and cared for. Write the ideas on an overhead projector, flip chart or blackboard. Submit your ideas to the appropriate body in your church for further consideration and implementation.

Conclusion

Read Revelation 21:1-7. Soon Jesus will return and take away all our suffering, tears, pain, frustration, illness and disability. Offer a concluding prayer for understanding, healing, and sensitivity. Pray for those who face the challenges of being disabled. Pray that the enthusiasm and interest generated in the seminar will be turned into practical help and caring that will make a difference in other's lives.

References

White, E. G. (1940). *The desire of ages*. Nampa, ID: Pacific Press Publishing Association.

Supplementary Ideas

- Show a film about a person's experience of disability, such as *Joni*, the life disability experience of Joni Eareckson Tada.
Note: JONI is a video featuring Joni as herself. The video depicts the diving accident that left her paralyzed and her struggles in the months that followed. It shows how God helped her piece her broken life together again. Available in English and Spanish. Order from JAF Ministries, P. O. Box 3333, Agoura Hills CA 91301, 1 (800) 523-5777. Price \$15.00 plus shipping. Website, www.jafministries.com/.
- Invite a disabled person to talk to the group.
- Hold a buffet-meal after the seminar, where each person is given a specific disability for the duration of the meal, such as blindness, deafness, hemiplegia, being in a wheelchair, etc. Stress the importance of helpfulness and co-operation, understanding and communication.
- For further information, contact Christian Record Services, 4444 South 52nd St, Lincoln, NB 68516, telephone: (402) 488-0981, e-mail: 74617.236@compuserve.com.