



Disability Awareness for All

Bible studies

Important Note: The Bible stories outlined below both involve miracles where the person with the hidden disability is no longer disabled. As such, they need to be used carefully. Our intent in using these stories was not to encourage prayers for healing but instead to get people thinking about how disabled people are treated by society and how Jesus offers a different way to engage with hidden disabilities.

Bible reading

Luke 1:5-24, 57 - 80 - Zechariah

- How and why did Zechariah become mute?
- How did Zechariah communicate with people when he was mute? *Hint: there are two ways mentioned.
- Why did the people sign to Zechariah?
- Would Zechariah's disability be obvious to other people?
- Can you think of any other disabilities that are hidden?
- How was Zechariah treated differently by other people after he became disabled?
- Do you identify with having a hidden disability OR do you know someone who does?
- Have you had any experiences of being treated differently because of it?
- Are there any benefits to hidden disabilities?
- What are the benefits of listening to people with hidden disabilities?

Case study

- Martin is 16 years old and has a chronic heart condition which can cause him to become fatigued more quickly than others his own age.
- When attending church, he finds it difficult to stand for long periods of time but feels under pressure to do so because this is what everyone else does during singing and prayers.
- Often he does stand but this quickly leads to him feeling tired and fed up, making it difficult to concentrate on worship. He finds he is more focused on how drained he feels rather than the reason he came to church.
- This also impacts him emotionally. He feels annoyed, like he shouldn't feel obligated, but he also experiences guilt when he sees everyone else standing, and feels like if he sits, he is doing something wrong.

1. How do you think Martin is feeling?
2. Does his age have any relevance on how he lives with his disability?
3. Can you explain why you think Martin feels pressure to conform?
4. What can you or/and your church do to help Martin?



Prayer:

Bowl of water

Pencils

Small people cutouts

Have a bowl of water ready. Distribute the people templates. Invite those present to write or draw all that they would like God to do for those living with disability. Gentle fold the arms, legs and head inwards and lay on the water. Watch the bodies open up as you share these prayers with God.

Mark 5:24 - 31: The Woman with the Issue of Blood

Bible reading

- Which person had a hidden disability in the story?
- How did the hidden disability affect the woman in the story?
- She tried to not be noticed but it was Jesus who drew attention to her - why do you think he did this instead of letting her be healed discreetly? (Especially because someone else was in a hurry to get help.)
- Her disability affected where she could go or who she could interact with in the community. Could it be that Jesus was freeing her from shame and exclusion?
- Do you know anybody who has ever felt shame or exclusion because of their hidden disability?

Case study

- Devin is autistic and is touch averse.
 - Every week during the church service, the worship leader encourages everyone to greet each other with a handshake.
 - Devin usually sits next to their friends who know that physical contact can make them feel distressed.
 - Devin's friends are away this week and they find themselves sat next to George who they don't know very well.
 - During the greeting time, George turns to Devin with a smile and tries to shake their hand.
 - Devin doesn't know what to do. They just say "sorry" and sit down looking intently at the order of service handout.
 - George doesn't say anything but his facial expression changes and Devin is worried that they have done something wrong.
1. What does it mean to be touch averse?
 2. How might someone misunderstand Devin's aversion to a handshake?
 3. Why might Devin struggle to understand whether they have done something wrong or not?
 4. Can you see any similarities or differences to the case study of Devin and the woman in the Bible story



Prayer

Oil or moisturiser

Tissues

Rub some of the oil or moisturiser into your hands and rub them in. As you do so share with God all your thoughts on hidden disabilities, especially those, like Devin's which leave them with feelings of confusion and discomfort. When you are ready pray the following prayer together.

God of love and grace, fill us with your spirit and help us to be gentle, tolerant and understanding of other people's needs, especially those that may be hidden.

Let me be open enough for the person to share their concerns and needs with me and then I in turn with them and You. Amen

