



Honoring the Weaker Members: Ministering to those in the Church Family with Special Needs

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I Corinthians 12:22-25

On the contrary, it is much truer that the members of the body which seem to be weaker are necessary; and those *members* of the body which we deem less honorable, on these we bestow more abundant honor, and our less presentable members become much more presentable, whereas our more presentable members have no need *of it*. But God has *so* composed the body, giving more abundant honor to that *member* which lacked, so that there may be no division in the body, but *that* the members may have the same care for one another.

I. What is it like in a family with special needs?

- A. Time is spent on different things.
 1. Doctors' visits – a lot more doctors and specialists at varying intervals; more health challenges in general.
 2. Therapy – a therapist will visit your home, or you will take your child to them, and they help them learn things like talking, speech, and language; gross motor skills (physical therapy), fine motor skills (occupational therapy), behavioral skills (behavioral

therapy). In our family these were usually one hour a week for each of them Betsy needed.

3. Paperwork – referrals, insurance, state services, federal services, making sure everything is renewed on time; and paperwork often increases with the age of the child.
4. Bookkeeping – eligibility for aid often means keeping track of funds coming in and going out and what everything is for.
5. More one-on-one time needed for direct teaching, supervising, and correcting.
6. More research, conversations, thinking about all the things the child deals with and finding solutions, or trying to find solutions; constantly on the lookout for ideas or different methods, and this will last for a lifetime.

B. Frustration in communication.

1. The child is often not able to tell you what they're going through.
2. Sometimes you aren't able to understand them when they ARE telling you what's going on.
3. You often can't reason with them.

II. Encouragement for families

A. Spiritual Disciplines

1. Scripture—God is sovereign and He is good.
2. Prayer—for wisdom in each situation, for help and grace, for increasing understanding and wisdom in your child.
3. Gratitude.

- B. Don't neglect discipling and teaching your child with special needs.
 - 1. Assume competence.
 - 2. Use times of discipline to explain sin and their flesh.
- C. Have fun with your child.
 - 1. Enjoy them!
 - 2. Enjoy time together as a family and be a team.
- D. Make a friend of another family.
 - 1. Encouragement to a Christian family.
 - 2. Witness to an unsaved family.
- E. Be willing to be open with others.

III. Ways to minister and encourage

- A. Prayer.
 - 1. Pray for the child and their family.
 - 2. Tell the family you're praying for them.
 - 3. Be a prayer partner for a period of time, maybe a few months.
- B. Teaching your children.
 - 1. Reading books.
 - 2. Allowing them to be friends, ask questions, be curious.
 - 3. Highlighting things that are the same.
- C. Ministering to families – "Be comfortable being uncomfortable until you're comfortable."

1. Changing and growing in our attitudes.
 - a. Moving from ignorance (Who sinned? This man or his father?) and pity.
 - b. First steps (care).
 - Asking what would help – talking instead of ignoring.
 - Being with them instead of walking by.
 - Being willing to try instead of waiting for someone “more qualified.”
 - Giving a cup of cold water.
2. At church—to visitors and regular families.
 - a. Know what’s available—bulletin, sensory bags.
 - b. Being a friend to those with needs—Buddies.
 - At church and church activities.
 - Include those with special needs.
 - Sitting with them in church.
 - c. Understanding siblings.
 - Bridges to both worlds—family and church/school.
 - o They are often the most called-upon to watch their sibling.
 - o “Glass children”—can be invisible because of the attention their sibling with special needs receives.
 - d. Teaching.
 - “Let the little children come unto me and forbid them not.”
 - Remembering their birthday.
 - Telling their parents what they did well, or the good experiences.

- Include them in the ways they like to be included (ask parents).
- e. Serving together (co-laborers).
3. Practical.
 - a. Laundry.
 - b. Cleaning.
 - c. Food—bags of groceries, freezer meals, gift cards.
 - d. Babysitting—taking time to understand the scope and being willing to get “trained in” and be a regular.

Resources

1. Children’s Books

- *Like Me*, Laura Wifler
- *The Spelling Window*, Dawn Watkins
- *God Made Me Unique*, Joni and Friends

(These three books are all from a Christian worldview and cover a range of disabilities.)

- *The Junkyard Wonders*, Patricia Polacco
- *The Boy Who Grew Flowers*, Jennifer Wojtowicz

(These two are not necessarily Christian but have a great message about kids who are not typical.)

2. Books

- *Bible Promises for Parents of Children with Special Needs*, Amy E. Mason (A topical guide of subjects and feelings of parents on the special needs journey and Bible verses that address them and help you speak the truth to yourself)
- *Sharing Love Abundantly in Special Needs Families*, Gary Chapman and Jolene Philo (How the love languages apply in a family with special needs, even with non-verbal)

members, even when you have limited time, money and energy.)

- *Embracing This Special Life*, Jenn Soehlin (The author talks about releasing what is unhealthy or even sinful—expectations or dreams to bitterness and anger—and embracing the circumstances and life God has given you.)
- *Joni*, Joni Eareckson Tada (Her testimony about gratitude is so powerful.)
- *Karen* and *With Love from Karen*, Marie Killilea (Marie is the mom to Karen, born with cerebral palsy before most doctors knew what that was.)
- *Special Grace*, Elrena Evans (She tells topical stories about her family and life alternating with a group of prayers for each section. This is so good as prayer starters for yourself, or praying for or with a friend.)
- *Unexpected Blessings*, Sandra Peoples (She writes about what she learned and is learning from God through her having a son with autism and a sister with Down syndrome.)
- *No Greater Love*, Becky Vaughn (This is the daughter of the founder of Hidden Treasure Christian School. Her surviving a fire and resulting physical handicaps are what led to the start of the school.)

3. Podcasts

- Rising Above - <https://www.risingaboveministries.org/podcast> (Becky Davidson, a mom of a son with special needs, interviews mostly moms of a wide range of children with special needs; very encouraging and uplifting, especially the “Flip Side Series” in November 2023.)

- Joni & Friends - <https://joniandfriends.org/podcast/> (She is always pointing to the Lord, and her testimony gives so much weight to her words on suffering. There are several. The four minute one is on BBN radio, but there are other longer ones as well.)

4. Websites

- Joni & Friends - <https://joniandfriends.org/> (helpful links and resources)
- Sandra Peoples - <https://sandrapeoples.com/> (helpful links and resources)
- Rising Above - <https://www.risingaboveministries.org/> (helpful links and resources)
- Awe & Wonder - <https://www.specialneedsministryresources.com/> (Bible curriculum for discipling your child with special needs. It has four different levels for differing abilities. We are using this with Betsy right now.)

5. Tracts

- "We All Have Special Needs," Becky Vaughn (personal testimony)
- "God's Word on Disability," Joni & Friends (about disabilities in general and God's purpose)
- "In a Quarter of a Second," Bobby McCoy (personal testimony)
- "Trust in the Lord: A Study of Trust in the Psalms," Becky Eckberg (This was a great encouragement during Betsy's heart surgery and time in the hospital.)

When Your Husband Becomes Your Responsibility

Mary Diachenko

Romans 8:28

And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose.

Finding Yourself in This Situation

My testimony of God's Grace—God's Provision—God's Strength.

"In every change He faithful will remain." (from Be Still My Soul)

Depending On God

- Learning to lean on Him.

"What God ordains is always good: His will is just and holy."

Hebrews 13:5b *For He Himself has said, "I will never desert you, nor will I ever forsake you."*

- Learning patience.

"As He directs my life for me, I follow meek and lowly."

James 1:3 (KJV) *Knowing this, that the testing of your faith worketh patience.*

- Learning to give thanks in everything.

“My God indeed in every need knows well how He will shield me.”
I Thessalonians 5:18 *In everything give thanks; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.*

- Learning to be content.

“To Him, then, I will yield me, To Him then, I will yield me.”
(Samuel Rodigast)

Philippians 4:11, 13 *Not that I speak from want for I have learned to be content in whatever circumstances I am.*
I can do all things through Him who strengthens me.

How the Body Can Help?

- Pray for the Holy Spirit's guidance.
- Be aware of those around you. There may be someone hurting who needs to have you come along beside her. God is the one who knits peoples' hearts together, but we have to be willing to follow His leading!
- Try to keep these wives a part of the body.
 - Ideas: texts, cards, sending a link to a hymn that has ministered to you, talk to them at church.
 - If this is a younger family, there may be children or teens who could use a ride to a church function or a teen activity.
 - If a wife is in the hospital with her husband a gift card for gas or a restaurant is helpful.

There's a wonderful thing about our church—You feel like you're not going through something alone.
(Karen Diachenko's testimony while having cancer.)

- PRAY—Never discount the power of heartfelt prayer!!!
- Take a meal. Ask when you can take it. It's better not to ask them to let you know if they need one. Most of us don't want to be a bother.
- Ask if you can do their laundry.

*Never let us think again that a get-well card from a Christian brother or sister is ill-timed. I've felt in the past that it was too late to send a special note. When we are led by the Spirit it is **never too late**. (From Mary Diachenko's journal after getting a card 2 weeks after her husband's surgery.)*

What God ordains is always good. This truth remains unshaken;
Tho' sorrow, need, or death be mine, I shall not be forsaken.
I fear no harm, for with His arm He shall embrace and shield me;
So to my God I yield me, So to *my God* I yield me.

**Be Aware:
Put feet to your prayers, use your
spiritual gifts for each other, and . . .**

Never forget Romans 8:28

What God Ordains Is Always Good
By Samuel Rodigast

What God ordains is always good: His will is just and holy;
And tho' the path be wrought with thorns, I follow meek and lowly.
My God indeed in every need knows well how He will shield me;
To Him, then, I will yield me.
To Him, then, I will yield me.

What God ordains is always good: He is my Friend and Father;
He suffers naught to do me harm, though many storms may gather.
Now I may know both joy and woe, some day I shall see clearly
That He hath loved me dearly.
That He hath loved me dearly.

What God ordains is always good: though I the cup am drinking
Which savors now of bitterness, I take it without shrinking.
For after grief God gives relief, my heart with comfort filling
And all my sorrows stilling.
And all my sorrows stilling.

What God ordains is always good: this truth remains unshaken.
Though sorrow, need, or death be mine, I shall not be forsaken.
I fear no harm, for with His arm He shall embrace and shield me;
So to my God I yield me.
So to my God I yield me.
Amen

Ideas for staying with your husband at the hospital:

- Keep a bag ready in case of an emergency. Have anything you'd need for overnight: brush, toothbrush and toothpaste, granola bars or something to eat on the spot, instant coffee, tea bags, cream, and sugar packets (you can usually get hot water from a CNA), etc.
- Don't forget your cell phone charger.
- Take your special Bible—the one you use for your time with the Lord. You will be comforted with the familiar.
- A notebook or journal. You can record what God is doing for you and in you. Record what you're learning (like what to take to the hospital) & anything you'll be able to pass on to others.
- You might want to take your own pillow. There's nothing like it!
- If you have much to haul back and forth from the hospital to your home, consider a small suitcase with wheels. It can save your back.
- Let the workers, from the nurses to those who bring the food tray, know that you appreciate them! A smile goes a long way and helps you give the Gospel.