

Ministering to the Disabled

Hello! I'm Pastor Ken Dignan. I'm the support pastor at Eagle Rock community church along with the pastoral staff, the senior pastor Henry Reyenga. We appreciate the opportunity to share with you in this course for pastoral care and concern. I've been a full-time credentialed minister for well over thirty-five years now. I'm at this for a while with the Lord's help. I've been blessed. It's been a great calling. It's been a challenging calling. There's been a lot of materials, a lot of insights that are necessary, a lot of wisdom that is to be gained and it's a lot more than just working on Sundays as you begin to realize all the different topics and principles and ministries that you can diversify yourself in.

The more exposure you have in your ministry and the more things you have exposure to, the greater your potential for ministry and for reaching out to those who have concerns and various cares. So that's the word ideally, the ideal word for pastor itself would be poimen which is found in Peter's writings and then also found in the writings of Paul especially in Ephesians 4 and it's in the area of verses 10, 11, 12 where we see him speaking about the pastors, teachers, evangelists, prophets, apostles. What's been termed in some practical church theologies is the fivefold ministry of those with especially potentially full-time calling of vocational callings.

At any event, these are the concerns and cares we're talking about here. This particular class is the issues of families with disabilities. To an individual who has a disability and then of course to the majority of individuals who have a disability, we'd have their family. Some statistics that are out there can say including AIDS victims and everything else from people with chronic migraines, there could be in our population fifty million people affected with some type of disability. We're not saying that they're not able to work or they're not able to do things. But there is some kind of a chronic physical, mental, emotional problem that would be called a disability in some way, shape, or form.

So that's a lot of people, a lot of families. If you want to say fifty million families though I know you'd throw in some widowers and single adults and etc, but the fact is there's a lot of people who we need to minister to as churches and as pastors. With this being true, we need to see the scriptures that are out there in the whole Bible that talk about some of these disabilities and God's credibility. There's one with Moses very similar one in Exodus 4:10-12. We know that Moses said to Lord, "I'm slow of speech. I'm slow of tongue." The Lord said to him "Who gave human beings their mouths and who makes them deaf? Or who makes them mute? Who gives them sight or makes them blind? Isn't that I the Lord?"

He said, “Isn’t that I the Lord?” A strange word. But here God is claiming that He Himself can and does often allow or even make someone disabled. Is that mean? Is that evil? Is that bad? That’s a good question. People always want to blame God and ask the “Why” question. If God is so loving, if God is so fair, if God is so just, why would He allow people to suffer so much? That’s a question that’s been asked out there. He did say here to Moses, “I will help you speak. I’ll help you teach what you have to say. I’ll be there with you but it doesn’t mean you’re not going to have a problem.”

So here we are, pastors. Pastoral concerns. Needs that people would have, a disability of some way, shape, or form. What do we do with it? How do we care about it? What about all those concerns? This scripture tells us here that God said, “I am involved in this so I allow certain things.” There was a scripture in the Gospel of John where there was a man born blind and the disciples were discussing amongst themselves. Who sinned that this man was born blind? Actually they’re thinking in their own natural human mindset that the reason that this person is blind is somebody did something wrong, that this just doesn’t happen out of nowhere. Somebody has to pay the price. Somebody has to take the blame, take the fall. That’s how we think as humans.

Jesus heard of it. Jesus Christ said in John 9 off the top of my head. He said, “What were you talking about? No one sinned that caused this man to be born blind so to speak. Not a direct sin for this man.” Sin itself brought decay. Sin itself entered the plan of mankind and the soul itself shall die. Genesis 1,2,3 talk about the curse. These things tell us here that yes, ultimately, Adam and Eve were created perfect, no sin, no sickness. They were perfect. But the day they sinned, then that brought about what we call the fall, the flesh, sinfulness, separation, incompleteness, chaos. Chaos came to humankind. Disease came. They weren’t originally created to die.

Think about it. Adam and Eve were originally created to last forever so to speak. They had an unusual type of body. I’m sure it was created that could take care of itself and not become ill. So that when he sinned, the Bible says that after he sinned, then the Earth fell. Mankind fell and the world fell so to speak. So then they had to close up the Garden of Eden and then that Garden they had to close it off. By closing it off, that brought about then what we call the Fall of Man. So it brings us to consider here now. Revelation 21 tells us that on that day, the day of the resurrection of all the bodies of the saints, of that day of the last judgment it says, there will be no more when He created the new Heaven and the new Earth.

There will be no more suffering. There will be no more pain, no more crime because the former things will have been passed away. So we see right there that there is coming a day where we will almost get back to the will have been passed away. So we see right there that there is coming a day

where we will almost get back to the Garden. Until then, we deal with the fall. We deal with disabilities. We deal with tragedies. We deal with cancers and physical illnesses and problems---physically, mentally, emotionally, spiritually.

This is where we're at and that is what the Bible says. God was going to help him through that. We think of 2 Samuel 4. It talks about Jonathan, Saul's son. He had a son that was lame at his feet. He was five years old when the tidings came of Saul and Jonathan out of Jezreel, and his nurse took him up, and fled: and it came to pass, as she made haste to flee, that he fell, and became lame. And his name was Mephibosheth. Mephibosheth was a son of Jonathan and Jonathan was a very dear beloved friend of King David and Jonathan and his father, King Saul, who didn't like David. But David found out where Mephibosheth was. He took him into his house, brought him into the king's quarters.

Samuel 9, I'll read that verse here that says, "Now when Mephibosheth, the son of Jonathan, the son of Saul, was come unto David, he fell on his face, and did reverence. And David said, Mephibosheth. And he answered, Behold thy servant! David said to him, 'Fear not: for I will surely show you kindness for Jonathan your father's sake, and will restore you all the land of Saul your father; and you shall eat bread at my table forever or continually as long as you're on this Earth.'"

So here we see that King David took pity on this person who had something no fault of his own so to speak directly other than he fell and when he fell he became lame or developed leg problems for the rest of his earthly life. They could not be corrected through any type of surgeries or medical interventions. And there was no divine intervention to hear to that brought him a miraculous healing. This is some parts in the Bible that talk about that fall, that sinful fall that brought about problems and accidents.

There's another one in 2 Corinthians 12:7-10 where Paul said, "To keep me from becoming too conceited" or because he was surpassing great revelations given to him, he said three times he prayed, "Lord, let this cup pass from me." And God says "No, I'm not going to let it pass from you." The Paul had some type of physical ailments, some type of physical illness. Many thought it could be something with his eyes, some type of glaucoma because he did speak in the Book of Galatians that he stopped off in Galatia because he was having eye problems and he said, "You could have given me your own eyes if you could have," he said.

See when with large print. I'm writing this myself because I can't see that well. We do know that when Paul the apostle was converted on the road to Damascus to arrest believers, we do know that in the history of his life in Acts 9, we see that he was struck to his feet, fell to his feet, and fell to the ground. We don't know if he was riding a donkey or a horse or if he was walking at that time. But anyway he was

on the ground and there's a voice from Heaven that said and God calls him. Jesus speaks to him and it says that he was blinded for three days and three nights and it said scales fell off his eyes. He was not living right. He consented to the death of Steven, one of the first deacons. He lived a life of sin going to kill believers, going to arrest them. He was going to incriminate them.

Jesus said, "Paul, Paul, why are you persecuting me, my church? When you hurt Christ, you hurt His church." When the church hurts, Christ hurts. When Christ is hurt and offended, we as the church are hurt and offended. So he prayed, Paul did, to take this thorn away, whatever it was. The purpose, the point is God says no. He didn't say, "I'll give you anything you want but you have to have enough faith." We hear in some walks of Christianity regarding miracles and healings. Sometimes He does, sometimes He doesn't and we still need to say, "Thy will be done." You can't just surmise that it's God's will to heal every sickness or problem or pain if you have enough faith or if you pray the secret prayer or claim the secret verse that will get you what you want.

That's an area that I deal with a lot myself having had a disability from polio and tried to jell that with some facets of Christianity and some facets of the teaching and preaching about what is called "name it and claim it," "blab it and grab it." Not to minimize them by any means by those fancy, cutesy little words there. But it's not as easy as one might think. You don't want to bruise and hurt other believers who might still suffer. They don't have to if they have enough faith. That's a very dangerous, slippery slope to walk on because there's a little judgmentalism and it's kind of looking with the log in your eye and the speck in your brother's eye so to speak. Jesus said. Don't judge when you can't know the whole story.

So he prayed and God said to him, "No, I'm not going to answer to you. Three times you prayed to me. My grace is sufficient to you for my power is made perfect in weakness." And then Paul said, "Okay, if that's how it is, then I'll delight." I don't know if he got kind of a little upset but he kind of got upset when He answered. "All right, if that's how it is, God, then give me more problems."

I'm sure he didn't really realize what he was saying there because he was going to get a little bit miffed at the Lord. But God let him handle it. He said, "For Christ's sake, then I'll delight in weaknesses and insults and hardships and persecutions and hardships. For when I am weak," he said in that passage in 2 Corinthians 12:7-10, "when I am weak, then I am strong."

Another one 1 Corinthians 1:26-29, "Brothers, think of what you were when you were called. Not many of you were wise by human standards. Not many of you were influential. Not many of you were from a noble birth. But the foolish things the Lord brought them up and brought the world to shame because God chose the weak things to shame the wise and to shame the strong and He chose the lowly

things of this world and to despise things of this world and the things that are not to nullify the things that are so that no one may boast before the Lord.”

Whatever you are physically, if you're strong physically, praise Him. If you're weak, praise Him. No matter if you're strong or weak physically, mentally, emotionally, trust the Lord. And that's what the Bible is telling us here. Not many of us were rude as hot shots. We are all we are but for the grace of God. I like this verse a lot. 1 Samuel 16:7. This has ministered to me personally in my own personal life because you can't look at me readily without knowing something's wrong with me.

When I did walk, I used to be able to walk prior to a number of years ago about maybe ten years ago. I came down of the evidence of what they call post polio syndrome. Not that the polio virus gets back alive again in my body so to speak because it only stays alive for two weeks from when you first get polio. That was without a vaccine. That was only for protection. I was only fourteen months old in 1952. It's gone back there. In 1955, they got the polio vaccine and that was from Jonas Salk that was able to stop the spread of polio.

In any event, I have a great deformity in my body from my neck down. Everything was affected. It affects your spine, your electrical charges of your nerve endings in your spine which then affects your muscles. Some more greater than others are affected. Some people ended up with a mired lung and could not breath on their own at all without the power of a machine to breath for them. Others have had other problems and difficulties. So it is what it is as they say.

This is 1 Samuel 16:7. “The Lord does not look at things the way man does. Man looks on the outward appearance.” I like this. “But the Lord looks at the heart.” The Lord looks at the heart. So we need to look as the Lord looks. Don't look at the outside makeup of a person. Look at their heart. Look how deep their heart is and get to the heart of the matter. As you get to the heart of the matter, that's what counts the most. Human beings look at the outside. Well, what does the outside look like? How can we judge him on his appearance?

Sometimes it's a tough thing when it comes to somebody who is disabled. People can maybe feel uncomfortable around you or they are a little taken aback by you. In life, you just want to melt, so to speak, in the background. Unless someone's a model or athlete and they want to stand out for their good appearances. If you're disabled, disfigured, deformed, you don't want somebody to make a big thing about it. I am told that when people get to know me, they can look past my wheelchair or past my deformities. I hope so. There are some that can't. I don't like special preferential treatment. I would rather just be treated as Ken. I've always tried to fight against that as a minister.

How many ministers do you know that have a deformity or a disability? If there are fifty million Americans with a disability, how many pastors do you know have a disability? And I mean a regular pastor. I don't mean just like a... Sometimes they can be stereotyped. "Oh yeah. We have Pastor Ken. He pastors our disabilities people." Kind of like "Oh, he's good for that because he's disabled so he understands them." But become a regular pastor to the whole church like a senior pastor or a main pastor to do this or that or the other?

I always felt called myself to be a pastor, not just a pastor. I don't want to use the word "just," but not to say that I minister to people in the hospital all the time or people with disabilities or people with tragedies. That's how you can measure. But that's not the main end result. I felt called and I've been blessed then to have always been able to be in full-time pastoral and minister. I started even as a youth pastor full time.

I was a full-time youth pastor and we had a hundred young people in our youth group and I made sure things were done with the kids and the music and the athletics and the games and the camps and the Bible studies and the Sunday school classes. We had a great youth group. Got them involved in music and Bible memorization. We had these things called Bible quiz teams where they would call against the other church youth groups. And in my denomination that I was involved with at that time, they had an award for the American Bible quiz team of any group. Got a free trip to the Holy Land. And that was every year competition at our headquarters denomination. Sometimes we would have a general council somewhere.

So in any event, to make the long story short, I'm saying the Lord has allowed me in these thirty-five years in ministry to be a pastor. I've been involved in areas like evangelism as evangelist, a teacher. I've been an apostle so to speak when it comes to setting up of a ministry where I pioneered and planted a couple of churches. I've been exposed to that and I'm very thankful for that.

So here we are. Man looks at the outside. But God looks at the inside. God can usually do a lot of things through you. Now we come to the exceptional children, I like the word "exceptional." But the politically correct would use the word "exceptional children" as opposed to "crippled" or "handicapped." Somebody says, "Where did the word 'handicap' come from?" I don't know how true it is. I just heard it passed down. But it's that a lot of people who were handicapped or physically unable to do certain things would have a baseball cap or a cap and they sit in the corner and shake the cap. It was a handy cap. They'd pull it up for people to put money in it.

I don't know. However you want to get that word, however it evolved, you just get that sad idea that a person can't work then so they used a handy cap to beg for money to put money in the cap. But

I've never felt and looked at myself personally as handicapped or disabled. If you had a disabled vehicle, it doesn't work. Well, I can work. I even went to a checkout a few times a few years ago just with my physical ability and my health etc. We had to go on social security disability. They look at me and say, "Well, you're not disabled, sir." I go, "I'm disabled. What are you talking about? Look at my body." They say, "Well, physically you are but from the government if you make over a thousand dollars a month or whatever, over ten thousand dollars a year, in Illinois you can't get disability because they say you're not disabled if you make over that amount of money." Who in the world in their lives could live on \$10,000 a year anyway? It'd be pretty tough a little on that.

But in any event, they said to me, "You're not disabled." I said, "Okay, fine." But in their judgment, I wasn't. But in the physical reality, there's many more expenses for somebody who is truly disabled. Vans are double the price. Wheelchairs are very expensive. Three thousand to ten thousand dollars. One wheelchair I priced out at one time was for \$40,000. Goodness gracious! Who can afford that with the stipend of the State of Illinois saying you can't make ten thousand dollars a year and get social security disability. And that's not a lot of money either. You're not going to get anything for nothing anymore in this world.

You've got a lot of people who are disabled that have come into your churches and our churches. We have ministered and helped them to believe, helped them to find gainful employment. Wow. Be an entrepreneur. At least you need to educate them. Teach them in the Bible. Minister to them. Joni Eareckson Tada who has a handicap ministry. She herself got in a diving accident when she was seventeen, eighteen years old. She broke her neck. Now she's in her late fifties, early sixties. She is still alive but has a lot of complications.

But she did a survey and only 2-4 percent of these people in America that are disabled claim to go to church. So you got 4 percent that come out of the fifty million. That's not much. I don't know how many percent is our ministers, full-time credentialed ministers. I don't know how many you know of. I don't know how many people in your church would come on a Sunday morning that would be in a wheelchair or use a walker or be mentally disabled or physically disabled. If there was fifty million disabled people in America, how many disabled go to your church if you're a pastor watching this or a future pastor to be trained?

Do we set up our churches to reach out to people's disabilities? I hope so. Jesus told us to go to the highways and byways. He told us that. Go to the highways and byways of life and He said beg them to come in. If the people that are "sick" don't come in, then get the ones that are not sick and beg them to come in.

Goodness. You've got all this stuff here for care and what are the churches doing? So we want them to be able to provide for them. If someone comes to your church and they have a child who is disabled, what are you going to do for them? And these are just a little list in these next couple of slides I'm going to deal with here with that ADHD, ADD. That's a pretty debilitating disorder. It's not that somebody's crazy up there. ADHD or ADD. It means that they don't have certain chemicals produced from their brain. Your brain is an organ and if it's not producing certain serotonin levels or certain dopamine levels or certain other levels, you're going to have different mood disorders.

It's a fact of life. Just like you can get diabetes. If someone has diabetes, do you yell at them and say, "Oh, it's all your fault! You're eating bad. You're eating too many sweets, too many carbohydrates, too many sugars. Your liver's not working. It's your problem. It's your fault. You're a bad person. You've got diabetes." Is that right? If you've got a heart disease or you've got heart problems, you got high blood pressure, you need to take blood pressure medicine, are you a bad person? Are you a person that's lower than low? No.

Whatever it is you might have, some kind of a brain disorder, not to your fault. ADD, OCD, Obsessive-compulsive disorder, bipolar, manic depression disorder, schizophrenia, whatever—these things are not your problem. They're not your fault. They are a problem but they're not your fault. So if you have to have a certain different ground level to help you learn, you need to have creativity with the part of the church at one time. The church was the creative factor of education. The home was the creative factor of education.

If you're not doing home schooling, you got to have some kind of schooling then for your children. If you're not doing all of the religious training of your children, if you want your church to be supplemental which is helpful, I've been at every church that supplement what the family is doing, well then when they come to church these families you want to have some type of a ministry or outreach for a child or a young person who would be disabled mentally, emotionally, or physically.

So what I'm saying here is we need to beef that up. Now if you've got somebody in the community that they are only in public education or they have to pay extra for Christian full-time education, then you want to have that in your church too. That means we need to develop our programs for people with emotional disturbances, hearing impairments. It's not a bad idea to have maybe occasionally sign language for your sermon. Learning disabilities is helpful for anything with mental retardation or cognitive disabilities, cognitive delay that's been used instead of mental retardation which kind of can have a negative word with the word "retarded" or "retardation."

We have physical disabilities, any kind of orthopedic impairments and these programs should be there for us to help us to overcome things with. We should be able to see all this other list I've got right here in our lesson here today. Other impairments means having any limited strength or vitality or alertness including a heightened alertness to environmental stimuli that results in limited alertness with respect to educational environments and also with regarding that is due to chronic or acute health problems. There's all kinds of those. The list goes on. I won't read the whole thing. Asthma, we've got diabetes and epilepsy, heart conditions, hemophilia, lead poisoning then leukemia, nephritis of kidneys, rheumatic fever, anemia, on and on.

People can have all kinds of disabilities. As we know, there are millions of people in America, and they can significantly affect a child's ability to learn or function successfully in schools. Let's have our Christian education program reflect people with disabilities. Let's ask for adults to volunteer to be an aide. Maybe in a Sunday school class or a children's church class if someone has autism or some type of chromosomal disease or malfunction, they may need to have an aide sit with them to break it down for them. Maybe they can't still sometimes. Maybe they need to get up and walk around, take a few more breaks than others who don't have ADHD or a chromosomal disease or autism, etc. and so on.

We need to be able to serve all the children and all the teenagers and all the adults to find ways to creatively teach them about the scripture. I encourage your church to do that. I know in Eagle Rock community church we've tried more and more to involve and to have people with disabilities come to our church. We want them to feel affected. We have a support group for them at our church. We have some children that have some chromosomal defects and abnormalities. We have people with all different kinds of things. So we want to reach out to them.

We want to have practical ministry to families with disabilities and we want to have special Bible classes for them, provide special facilities, teachers, helpers, personal aides so they can succeed. Wow. I encourage your church to do that. I would love to see every church have it matched. I would love to see wheelchairs at every church. When I travel around also, because I've done that as executive director of Til Healing Comes Ministries, I've done that now for the last twenty years and I began THC, Til Healing Comes Ministries, to help families learn how to trust God until the healing comes.

I used to say in the older days, "Whether here, there, or in the air, your healing's coming" which means that you're here in this life, you can pray for a miracle either in the rapture when you're taken up between here and Heaven and the new miracle comes or when you're in Heaven. Here, there, or in the air. Your healing is coming. So until then, you need to trust the Lord. Til Healing Comes Ministries' main calling is to help people learn how to trust God until healing comes. Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego

in Daniel 3 I think it is it says there when they were taken and got arrested by King Nebuchadnezzar, they didn't bow down and worship the idol. They said the furnace was heated to kill anybody who didn't worship the image of the king, his idol. They were put in the fiery furnace they said.

Daniel 3:17-18 says, "God is able to deliver us from this fiery furnace. But if not, know King Nebuchadnezzar, that we're not going to bow to your idol. We're going to bow only to the Lord God Jehovah." No matter what until their healing came, until their miracle came. God is able. God will. But even if not, we're going to still trust the Lord. That's the theme verse for Til Healing Comes Ministries to help people live by faith, grow by faith, and to live by faith. We want to be able to encourage churches to support any type of ministries.

Jesus said, "Blessed are you if you have ministered or done something to or for someone in My name." Gave some clothing, visited them in the hospital, cared for them. He says, "As you've done unto Me, the least of My children..." What did He say? "You've done unto Me." So if you help someone who's disabled mentally, emotionally, physically, spiritually, Jesus is saying "if you help them, you've just as well helped somebody like Me."

These are truths. These are the things that God wants us to do. I encourage you to have a disability ministry. I encourage you to reach out in the disability ministry. I would love you to make it a part of your pastoral concern. Work it into the framework of your congregation. Goodness gracious. When someone comes into your church and say, "Now this is what being a Christian is all about. Wow." It should.

Our churches should reflect what it really means to be a real Christianity Christian community who is reaching out to all colors---red, yellow, black, and white. All makeup. Physical disabilities, mental, emotional disabilities, all the different groups of people who would be married, singles, people who had been divorced, people who had been widowed, people who had lost loved ones, people who had lost loved ones to suicide, lost loved ones in divorce, to untimely death, etc.

Wow. God's calling the church to minister to the concerns and needs of others. God bless you. I trust that you continue to get a lot of good stuff out of these courses here for pastoral care and concerns. I'm Ken Dignan again. Get your homework done. Get your assignments done. Answer the questions and continue to grow in the Lord. God bless you. We'll see you again next time.