



# *Belonging Together* **on Earth**

## Background

PART FIVE IN THE TEACHING SERIES ON BIBLICAL JUSTICE BY SCOTT HIGGINS...

### **On Earth**

as it is in Heaven

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## **On Earth** as it is in Heaven

### **Background**

Rev. Scott Higgins

2019

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# Introducing Belonging Together on Earth

Jesus was asked by his disciples how they should pray, and he replied 'Your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.' (Matthew 6:10)

The kingdom of God was not something that would arrive in the future. It commenced and began being realised in the life of the disciples and the early Christian church. Jesus calls his followers to be a community in which everyone is included and is valued for their unique gifts and contribution.

## On Earth as it is Heaven

In 2018 Baptist Care SA, in conjunction with Baptist Churches of South Australia, produced the 'On Earth as it is Heaven' resource on Biblical Justice that focuses on how Christians can 'do justice' in contemporary Australia. On Earth provides practical examples for churches and individuals to connect with Baptist Care SA's current work with four vulnerable populations: people experiencing homelessness, people from refugee and asylum seeker backgrounds, people living with mental health conditions, and people exiting the prison system. In 2019 we are pleased to add a fifth group for whom justice is imperative, namely people living with disabilities.

## Belonging Together on Earth

Our new resource is called 'Belonging Together on Earth' and builds our biblical understanding of justice around nurturing inclusive community within churches, for people living with disability and their carers.

Disability touches almost every Australian at some point in their life. Jesus spent a lot of time ministering to people with disabilities, so it is only natural that as followers of Jesus we would also pay attention to including and supporting people with disabilities in our church communities. The 'Belonging Together on Earth' resource will help you to do this. The resource includes:

- *Background*: may be used for sermon research, or as notes for small group exploration on the topic
- *Sermon Outline*: assists the preacher to construct their sermon. It is based around the encounter between Jesus and a blind man called Bartimaeus, in the Gospel of Mark. The guide provides material to use in a sermon and describes an approach that can be used rather than an outline or full text
- *Discussion Guide*: useful for small group study or a larger workshop
- *Prayer Card*: this card can be printed out (or ask Baptist Care SA for printed copies) and distributed to every person at church/home group. Encourage people to place the card on their fridge or another place where they will see it each day, and pray one prayer point each day for the coming week
- *Additional downloadable resources*: stories, video clips and ways to connect with the ministry/work of Baptist Care SA. Visit [www.baptistcaresa.org.au/belonging-together](http://www.baptistcaresa.org.au/belonging-together)

The purpose of this resource is to help people in churches to be more aware of disability, and consider their current facilities and practices so they can find ways to be intentionally inclusive. Ideally, the sermon and the Bible study would go hand-in-hand, with a sermon either preceding or following a church-wide Bible study in groups in the midweek.

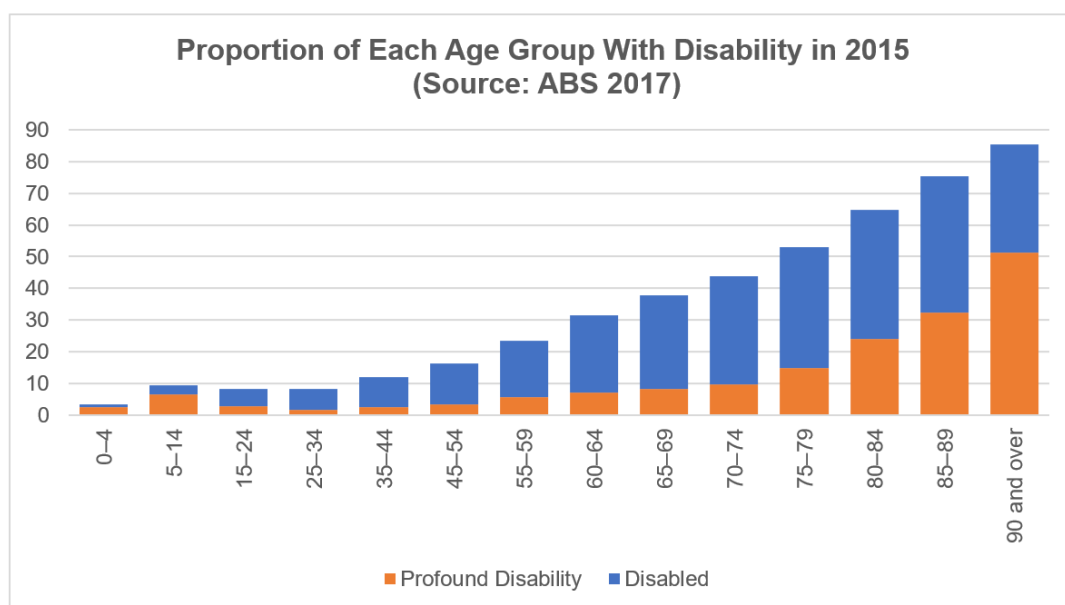
We encourage leaders to include space for the exploration of personal and church-wide practical actions. Set aside time to hear the voice of people living with disabilities in your church. Make use of additional resources and speakers available from Baptist Care SA to support your exploration and locate points of mission and ministry connection. You may choose to conduct an accessibility audit of your church building and practices relating to various disabilities, and then agree on some actions to implement going forward. You may be surprised at how easy this is and how helpful it can be, because accessibility actions are often no cost or low cost, yet they have profound impact! There are audit suggestions and accessibility guides available from the Baptist Care SA website that you can use or adapt: [www.baptistcaresa.org.au/connections](http://www.baptistcaresa.org.au/connections)

# Background Notes

*Disability is part of the human condition. Almost everyone will be temporarily or permanently impaired at some point in life, and those who survive to old age will experience increasing difficulties in functioning. Most extended families have a disabled member, and many non-disabled people take responsibility for supporting and caring for their relatives and friends with disabilities. Every era has faced the moral and political issue of how best to include and support people with disabilities. (World Health Organisation)<sup>1</sup>*

The Australian Bureau of Statistics reports a person as living with a disability if they “have a limitation, restriction or impairment, which has lasted, or is likely to last, for at least six months and restricts everyday activities.”<sup>2</sup> Impairments may be: sensory (loss of sight or hearing, speech difficulties); intellectual (difficulty learning or understanding things); physical (e.g. blackouts, seizures, incomplete use of arms, legs, fingers); psychosocial (e.g. nervous condition, mental illness); or head injury, stroke or acquired brain injury.

By these criteria, almost 1 in 5 people<sup>3</sup> in Australia live with a disability, and 1 in 18 people has a disability that can be categorised as profound or severe.<sup>4</sup>



**Chart 1 Proportion of Each Age Group With Disability in 2015<sup>5</sup>**

Disability is significant across all age groups, but increases dramatically as people get older. For example, 1 in 50 children aged 0-4 years and 1 in 20 children aged 5-14 years live with profound or severe limitation in core activities compared to more than 1 in 2 people aged 75 years or older.<sup>6</sup>

## Disability, Community & Inclusion

It is common for people to think of disability in terms of a person's physical or mental impairments, but this is insufficient to explain how an impairment becomes a disability. Disability occurs in the interaction between a person with an impairment and the community in which they live. This was highlighted in two submissions to a 2009 study of the experience of disability in Australia:

*"If I lived in a society where being in a wheelchair was no more remarkable than wearing glasses, and if the community was completely accepting and accessible, my disability would be an inconvenience and not much more than that. It is society which handicaps me, far more seriously and completely than the fact that I have Spina Bifida."*<sup>7</sup>

*"The gym offered a separate class for kids with disabilities. I asked one of the teachers whether it would be possible for my daughter to attend one of the other mainstream classes. She frowned and looked concerned, and said that was why they had created the separate class. I said she was perfectly capable of joining in with the other girls. She said 'Well that's OK for your daughter but if we let her in we will have to let everyone else in'. These are not elite gymnasts. They are little girls jumping around in leotards having fun on a Saturday morning."*<sup>8</sup>

In the last decades, Australia has made significant gains in becoming more inclusive of people with disabilities. We are a long way from the time when people with disabilities were locked away in institutions or exhibited in circus sideshows for the entertainment of others. The Federal Government passed the Disabilities Discrimination Act in 1992, which prohibits discrimination against people with disability regarding employment, education, accommodation, accessing or using services, and accessing or using public places.<sup>a</sup> This is accompanied by Standards issued by the Attorney General that identify obligations in the areas of property, streetscapes, education and public transport.<sup>b</sup> It is now expected that people with disabilities will be treated with respect; that public spaces, recreational facilities, workplaces, etc. will be accessible to people with disabilities, and that they will not face discrimination on the basis of their disability. However, there is still progress to be made.

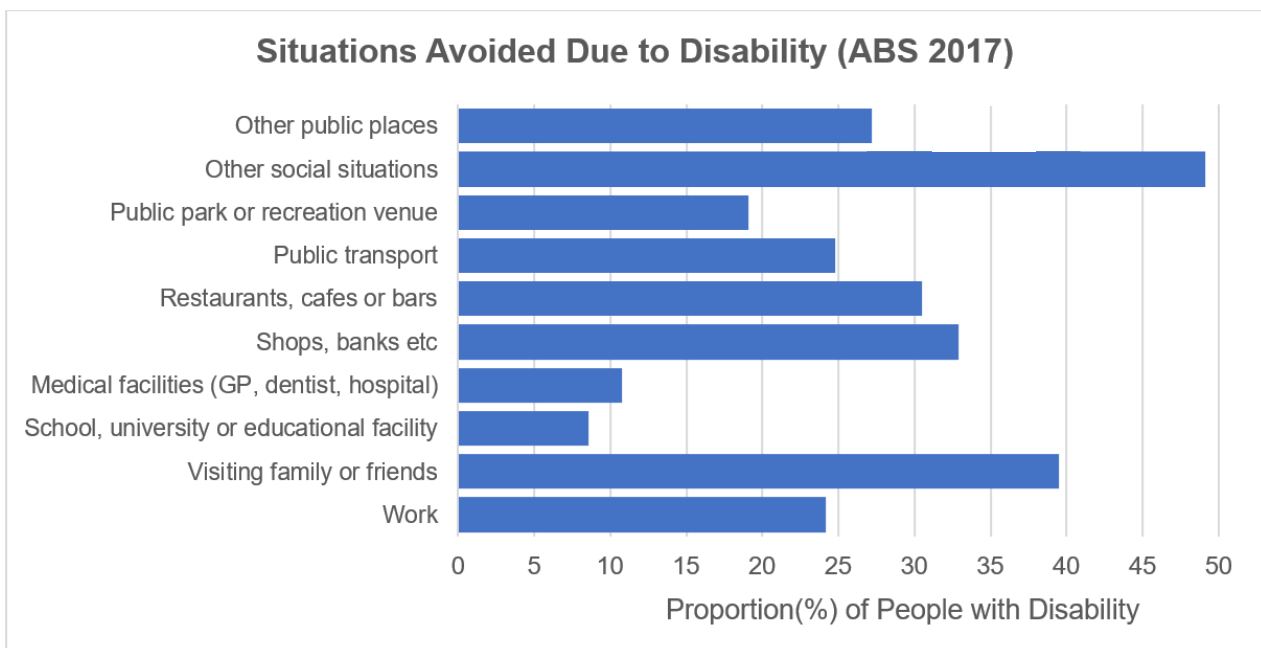
In 2015, 50% of people living with a severe disability reported that in the previous 12 months they did not leave home as often as they would have liked; 31% reported difficulty accessing buildings;<sup>9</sup> 60% reported they avoided situations because of their disability<sup>10</sup>; and 22% reported they had faced unfair treatment or discrimination because of their disability.<sup>11</sup>

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a. For more information see Australian Human Rights Commission, 'Know your rights: Disability discrimination' <<https://www.humanrights.gov.au/know-your-rights-disability-discrimination>>

b. For more information see Australian Human Rights Commission, 'Know your rights: Disability discrimination' <<https://www.humanrights.gov.au/know-your-rights-disability-discrimination>>





**Chart 2 Situations Avoided Due to Disability<sup>12</sup>**

People with disabilities are at greater risk of violence and abuse. For example, a 2018 study by the Human Rights Commission found the reported cases of violence and abuse against people with disabilities was almost double that of persons without disabilities.<sup>13</sup> Studies such as these, alongside a groundswell of anecdotal reports, have led the Australian Government to launch a Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse and Neglect of People with a Disability, which commenced in April 2019.<sup>c</sup>

The hopes and possibilities for a society in which people living with disabilities are fully and genuinely included is well expressed by this person with a disability:

*“Disability is characterised by desire for positive change and striving for emancipation and flourishing. It is seen every day amongst people living with disability. It is active hope. We desire a place within the community! This place is not just somewhere to lay down our heads, but a place which brings comfort and support with daily living, friendship, meaningful work, exciting recreation, spiritual renewal, relationships in which we can be ourselves freely with others. And out of this, great things may flourish.*

*Perhaps we will begin to feel better about ourselves, to come to know ourselves as honoured, respected, accepted, yes, loved. To be healed from shame, feeling unworthy, undesirable, ugly, difficult, not smart enough, not sporty enough, not lovely enough. And perhaps we might be freed from our terrible daily fears that it all won't last, that more rejection is written into our lives. Maybe our dreams will no longer be filled with the traumatic fear of others pushing us around.*

c. For more information see Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of People with Disability <<https://disability.royalcommission.gov.au/Pages/default.aspx>>

*Perhaps a time will come when we no longer have to protect ourselves from loss and can feel that this place is the place of creation, of re-creation, co-creation. Perhaps then our loneliness will fade. Perhaps then we will belong and our gifts (perhaps meagre, perhaps spectacular) freely shared. And from there will flow all the delights and tragedies of a life lived in the community, shaped not by exclusion and oppression but by everyday ordinariness (whatever that might be)".<sup>14</sup>*

## Thinking Theologically about Disability

In order to think biblically about disability, we should place it in the context of human vocation and community. In Genesis 1:26-28, humankind is created in the image of God and commissioned to fill and rule the earth. Humankind shares the earth with the other creatures, but does so in a unique way.

*Then God said, "Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals, and over all the creatures that move along the ground."*

*So God created mankind in his own image,  
in the image of God he created them;  
male and female he created them.*

*God blessed them and said to them, "Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground." (Genesis 1:26-28 NIV)*

The calling of humankind is to multiply and fill the earth, to subdue the earth, and to rule over the other living creatures (v26, 28). We are to do so, not as those bent on exploitation, satisfaction and destruction, but as the only creature said to be created in/as the image of God.

The image has been understood in three main ways:

- *substantive view*: humans have a god-like capacity that the animals don't (e.g. the capacity to reason)
- *social view*: humans are social creatures just like God who is a community of three. To image God is to live in loving, graceful and faithful relationships
- *representational view*: human beings are created to represent God to each other and to the rest of creation.

These views are not mutually exclusive, but the last is favoured by the majority of biblical scholars and arguably fits most directly with the calling to fill creation, subdue the earth and rule the creatures.<sup>d</sup>

Humankind's vocation was to spread across the earth, building communities that reflected the

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d. For more information read RJ Middleton, 'The Liberating Image: The Imago Dei in Genesis 1', Brazos Press, Michigan, 2005

character of God and developed the earth in such a way that it continued to be a source of nourishment to all living creatures.

This vision informs the rest of the biblical narrative. Set against a world in which humankind turned to the worship of idols, became violent, selfish and greedy, and exploited those who were poor and vulnerable, Israel was to be different. Rescued from slavery in Egypt, the Israelites were to worship Yahweh alone, reflect to each other and to all living creatures the welcome, kindness, goodness, love, compassion, generosity, faithfulness and justice that marks God, and ensure that every member of the community was sustained by the fruitfulness of the land.<sup>e</sup>

Jesus called Israel to recover this vocation and saw in his disciple group the community of faithful love and stewardship that Israel and humankind were called to be. His was a community in which forgiveness was found in abundance; the naked were clothed; the hungry fed; the sick comforted; the sinner challenged; the outcast embraced (e.g. Matthew 5-7; Matthew 25:31-46).

Jesus' community was one in which love preceded merit, inclusion preceded repentance and grace preceded obedience. His was a community in which the righteousness of the Pharisees, which demanded observance of a complex set of rules and rituals, was rejected for the greater righteousness of love, which saw beyond the letter of the law to the fulfilment of its purpose, that is, the creation of a community that imaged God.

This understanding of vocation carried over into the earliest post-resurrection Christian communities. They were to be places where social status had no bearing on the regard with which people were held; in which the widow, the poor and the orphan found care; and in which the "works of the flesh" - those behaviours that saw human beings exploiting, abusing or harming others - were replaced with the "fruit of the Spirit": love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, gentleness, self-control (Galatians 5:22-23).

The core vocation of humankind then, is to build worshipping communities that reflect the character of the One they worship, and seek the well-being of every person and every creature with which they share the earth. With regard to disability this situates the church as a community that should value and practise inclusion, generosity, love and grace.

## The Old Testament

As a premodern agrarian society, Israel was comprised of small, labour intensive family farms with relatively low productivity. People with disabilities were extremely vulnerable in such societies. They were often unable to work the land and were easy targets for prejudice and discrimination. It was not uncommon for them to be characterised as cursed by the gods, to become objects of fear, or to be pushed off their land. Similarly, those with mental health issues were characterised as possessed by evil spirits, and in the absence of community systems of care, could be excluded from the community and/or physically restrained.

The Old Testament law warns the Israelites against these types of stigmatising: "Do not curse the deaf or put a stumbling block in front of the blind, but fear your God. I am the Lord." (Leviticus 19:14 NIV). Rather, they were to love their neighbour (Leviticus 19:18).

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e. For more information on Jubilee see Baptist Care SA, *'On Earth as it is in Heaven' Background Notes*, Chapter 1 'The world we want to see' page 3 <[https://baptistcaresa.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/BCSA\\_On-Earth-as-it-is-in-Heaven-Background-Document-FINAL-Digital.pdf](https://baptistcaresa.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/BCSA_On-Earth-as-it-is-in-Heaven-Background-Document-FINAL-Digital.pdf)>. Found via [www.baptistcaresa.org.au/onearth](http://www.baptistcaresa.org.au/onearth)

These injunctions concerning those who were disabled should be read as part of the Law's concern that Israel should be a society in which the interests and dignity of the vulnerable were respected and people were not exploited or oppressed. People with disabilities were included in the more general injunctions that the Israelite economic system should ensure interest-free loans to people in need, forgiveness of outstanding debt and return of ancestral land every fifty years; in the festivals, feasts and worship, the people should care for each other because that was the hallmark of the Israelite community.<sup>f</sup>

Given this, it is somewhat confronting to find males within the priestly tribe excluded from offering sacrifices if they were physically blemished:

*The Lord spoke to Moses, saying: Speak to Aaron and say: No one of your offspring throughout their generations who has a blemish may approach to offer the food of his God. For no one who has a blemish shall draw near, one who is blind or lame, or one who has a mutilated face or a limb too long or one who has a broken foot or a broken hand, or a hunchback, or a dwarf, or a man with a blemish in his eyes or an itching disease or scabs or crushed testicles. No descendant of Aaron the priest who has a blemish shall come near to offer the Lord's offerings by fire; since he has a blemish, he shall not come near to offer the food of his God. He may eat the food of his God, of the most holy as well as of the holy. But he shall not come near the curtain or approach the altar, because he has a blemish, that he may not profane my sanctuaries; for I am the Lord; I sanctify them. (Leviticus 21:17-23)*

This needs to be understood in the context of the Levitical concept of holiness. The temple and the land were seen as taking on the holiness of God who was present, and the people were to conduct themselves accordingly by loving their neighbour, practising justice, showing mercy, being compassionate, etc. To reinforce this, an elaborate purity system was established in which things, people and places could be "clean", "unclean" or "holy". Some things could be "unclean" by nature, others could be made temporarily "unclean". Importantly, "the unclean" was not to come into contact with "the holy".

Scholars have long sought to understand the logic of the purity system. Perhaps the most widely embraced approach was suggested by anthropologist Mary Douglas<sup>15</sup>, who proposed that clean/unclean related to completeness. For this reason, clean and unclean could denote moral completion or incompleteness, but were regularly applied to things to which no guilt or shame were attached. For example, while animals could be divided into clean and unclean, Israel celebrated all animals as the handiwork of God, who delighted in them, cared for them, and made provision for them (Genesis 1, Psalm 104). Bodily emissions such as semen and menstrual blood made a person temporarily unclean, yet were parts of the human reproductive system created by God.

Leviticus 21:17-23 indicates that disability played into Israel's purity system (as did gender, food, clothing, etc.) but should not be read as implying that the person who belonged to the priestly caste but whose body did not correspond to the regular physical condition of the typical adult was

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f. For more information on Jubilee see Baptist Care SA, 'On Earth as it is in Heaven' Background Notes, Chapter 1 'The world we want to see' page 3 <[https://baptistcaresa.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/BCSA\\_On-Earth-as-it-is-in-Heaven-Background-Document-FINAL-Digital.pdf](https://baptistcaresa.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/BCSA_On-Earth-as-it-is-in-Heaven-Background-Document-FINAL-Digital.pdf)>. Found via [www.baptistcaresa.org.au/onearth](http://www.baptistcaresa.org.au/onearth)

morally or spiritually deficient, or outside the care of God and community.

When we turn from the Law to the prophets, we discover a strong focus on Israel's failure to follow the injunctions of the Law, and particularly, the failure to worship Yahweh alone and to treat others with kindness and justice. The powerful are criticised for exploiting the poor, the widow, the orphan and the foreigner, and salvation involves the creation of a world in which God alone is worshiped and those who were previously exploited, marginalised and oppressed live in welcoming, generous and just communities (e.g. Isaiah 65:17-25).

People living with disabilities are included among those who were marginalised and exploited, and to whom God would bring justice and inclusion (Jeremiah 31:8; 35:4-6; Micah 4:6-7)

*"See, I am going to bring them from the land of the north, and gather them from the farthest parts of the earth, among them the blind and the lame, those with child and those in labor, together; a great company, they shall return here." (Jeremiah 31:8)*

## The New Testament

The Gospels declare that in and through Jesus, the future reign of God spoken of by the prophets finds expression. In accord with the Old Testament prophets, it was a kingdom in which there would be a reversal of fortunes for those living with disabilities. They would be brought from the margins to the centre, their bodies would be healed and they would participate in the reign of God. So it was that when John the Baptist sent messengers to find out if Jesus was the One bringing the kingdom, the response of Jesus was,

*"the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the poor have good news brought to them." (Matthew 11:4-6)*

The Gospels allow us to glimpse the experiences of people with disabilities at the time of Jesus. A number of those with disabilities are brought to Jesus by their friends and families, suggesting that at least some enjoyed supportive and caring community, but also that their disabilities were seen to make their lives difficult. Others lacked such a supportive environment. The blind and lame can be found begging on the streets; a man who is emotionally and mentally disturbed by a legion of demons is found bound in chains; lepers were isolated. The question of the disciples in John 9:1-3 suggests it was common to see disability as a punishment for sin.

In line with the Old Testament law and prophets, Jesus sees the welcome, inclusion and healing of those with disabilities as an outworking of God's restorative presence. He heals both bodies and communities.

On the one hand, Jesus heals large numbers of those who lived with disease and disability. On the other hand, Jesus called for the formation of communities in which those flung to the margins of society and subjected to the cruel anonymity of poverty, exploitation and despair, are sought out and fully included.



*“When you give a luncheon or a dinner, do not invite your friends or your brothers or your relatives or rich neighbors, in case they may invite you in return, and you would be repaid. But when you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, and the blind. And you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you, for you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous.” (Luke 14:12-14)*

The converse of this is described in Jesus’ parable about a lame beggar called Lazarus and his rich neighbour (Luke 16:19-31). Day in, day out, Lazarus lay in a state of distress outside the home of a very wealthy man who ignored him. When they die their situations are reversed. The lame beggar finds himself in a state of comfort and the rich man in a state of suffering and pain. The point of the parable is that the rich man should not have neglected the lame beggar who lay outside his gates, instead treated him with kindness, generosity and justice.

As noted earlier, this is part of a broader theme in the ministry and teaching of Jesus: that God’s kingdom created a new experience of community.

## **On Healing of Bodies and Communities**

The arrival of God’s kingdom in Jesus included the healing of diseases and disabilities and the healing of communities. What does this mean for the ways we respond to those with disabilities in our churches today?

It is beyond the scope of this study to offer a theology of healing. We do note however that at the same time the New Testament celebrates healings as a sign of God’s reign, it also recognises the formation of character through suffering and challenge as a sign of God’s kingdom work (e.g. Romans 5:1-5; James 1:1-18).

2 Corinthians 11-12 is particularly significant for how we negotiate disability and healing. In this section of the letter the apostle Paul takes on an unfavourable comparison drawn between himself and a group of self-appointed “super apostles” admired by the Corinthian Christians. The super-apostles excelled at public speech and were admired for their mastery of life. Paul, by contrast, lacked rhetorical flourish and his life was marked by tragedy and shame.

In the midst of this Paul learned something profound. He was “given” a “thorn in the flesh”. Scholars speculate what it might have been. Suggestions include lack of rhetorical flourish; poor eyesight (a quite severe disability in the period before spectacles); and repeat bouts of malaria. No-one can be quite sure. All we know is that this thorn was disabling, public and painful, so much so that Paul pleaded with God for healing, but there was no healing. For Paul this would come but only at the resurrection of the dead. For now, the thorn remained, and became a source of enormous strength and blessing, for Paul learned to see God working in and through him while he was weak.

*“[God] said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.” Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ’s power may rest on me. That is why, for Christ’s sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong”*  
(2 Corinthians 12:9-10 NIV)

Our approach to disability must embrace the hope of full restoration of the body at the resurrection, celebrate those occasions in which the future resurrection experience is brought into the present in the form of physical healing, and be attentive to the grace and knowledge of God experienced in unique ways by those who live with disability. Any church that seeks to encourage bodily healing must ensure it also makes space and provides support for those whom God does not heal before the resurrection.

Additionally, churches should consider that it may be the church that needs the greatest healing rather than the person with disabilities. One of the most powerful insights that has emerged around disability is that communities that are not inclusive are frequently nominated by people living with disabilities as the greatest challenge that they face. Indeed, as noted earlier, impairment becomes disabling when those with an impairment are unable to participate fully in the life of their community.

Given the vocation of the church and of humankind is to build worshiping communities in which people experience God's love, grace, welcome, kindness, compassion and justice<sup>9</sup>, churches do well to dialogue with people with disabilities to discern whether they are experiencing this in their situation. Does the physical design of the building, the positioning of furniture, the language and rituals of worship, the timing of events, etc. invite people with disabilities in, or does it make it more difficult for them to participate? Are their experiences of grace, their giftings of the Spirit, and the wisdom and insights they have gained through their life journey valued and celebrated?

## The Challenge for Churches

1. How are we recognising the people with disabilities in our community?
2. How are we valuing people with disabilities and the gifts they bring in our community?
3. How are we developing a plan that ensures people living with disabilities are included in every dimension of community life?
4. How are we creating opportunities and enabling full participation for people with disabilities?
5. How are we supporting the carers and families of people living with disability?

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g. For more information on Jubilee see Baptist Care SA, *'On Earth as it is in Heaven' Background Notes*, Chapter 1 'The world we want to see' page 3 <[https://baptistcaresa.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/BCSA\\_On-Earth-as-it-is-in-Heaven-Background-Document-FINAL-Digital.pdf](https://baptistcaresa.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/BCSA_On-Earth-as-it-is-in-Heaven-Background-Document-FINAL-Digital.pdf)>. Found via [www.baptistcaresa.org.au/onearth](http://www.baptistcaresa.org.au/onearth)

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# On Earth as it is in Heaven

In 2018 Baptist Care SA in conjunction with Baptist Churches of South Australia produced the 'On Earth as it is Heaven' resource on Biblical justice which considers the ways Christians can 'do justice' in contemporary Australia. It explores what the Bible says about justice and the way Jesus teaches his followers to live a just life.

**'Human beings are created in God's image, are the object of God's great love, and the beneficiaries of God's great gift of the earth and its resources. Justice demands that we treat each other in a manner befitting this.'**

The Teaching Series includes the following downloadable components:

- Introduction
- Background Document
- Sermon Outlines
- Discussion Guide
- Prayer Cards
- Justice Survey Tool – for pastors/church leadership to use to help their church become more justice centred

The [On Earth as it is Heaven](#) resource components can be used individually, as a package or in a variety of combinations.

There is a series of 4 sermons building on each other, or a one-off sermon...

- Sermon 1: The world we want to see
- Sermon 2: The justice of Jesus
- Sermon 3: Where does the problem lie?
- Sermon 4: How can we do justice?

'On Earth as it is Heaven' provides practical examples for churches and individuals to connect with Baptist Care SA's current work with four vulnerable populations. The Discussion Guide and Prayer Cards focus on these four groups, and client clips and stories are provided for inclusion in sermons. The groups are:

- **People from a refugee background**
- **People experiencing homelessness**
- **People living with mental health issues**
- **People exiting the prison system**

## **\*Prayer Cards**

Printed copies of the cards are available FREE of charge from Baptist Care SA. If you are intending to use these in your church or small groups, please contact us and we'll supply as many copies as you need. Contact our Church Support Team via [churchsupport-team@baptistcaresa.org.au](mailto:churchsupport-team@baptistcaresa.org.au) to receive your copies.

For more information about 'On Earth as it is in Heaven' visit [www.baptistcaresa.org.au/onearth](http://www.baptistcaresa.org.au/onearth)

# Connections Resources for inclusive church communities

Our communities are not to be places where we merely share space, but they are to be places where we proactively work for one another's welfare.

Inclusion is not about creating more programs, it is about the culture of our churches reflected in the language we use, accessibility of our churches, and creating opportunities for full participation of everyone so we can all contribute and grow our gifts.

As part of the Connections project, Baptist Care SA held focus groups and had a steering group for the project of people with lived experience of disability and carers who co-designed the content and provided photos for the 10 practical guides for inclusion. These guides use the voices of people living with disability to provide their top tips for inclusion, providing information, personal stories and examples that work for local churches.

1. **Disability awareness:** Care for others
2. **Intentional inclusion:** We are better together
3. **Accessible church:** Disability is not the issue, accessibility is
4. **Effective communication:** Relationships start with communication
5. **Creating support:** Look out for one another's interests
6. **Carers' perspective:** Welcome and understanding
7. **Managing challenging behaviour:** Working together to find a solution
8. **Connected community:** Promote your activities
9. **Autism-friendly church:** Engage, affirm, challenge
10. **A theology of belonging:** 'All one in Christ Jesus'.

The [Connections Resource](#) page contains additional resources referred to in the guides covering:

- Websites resourcing inclusive communities
- Resources for churches
- Audit tools for inclusive communities
- Communication resources
- Transport in South Australia
- Carers support
- Managing challenging behaviour
- Autism friendly church

For more information about the Connections Resource visit [www.baptistcaresa.org.au/connections](http://www.baptistcaresa.org.au/connections)





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