



Strength made perfect

Disability and the church

Written by the Rev John Beauchamp

Participants handout

	Page
Session 1: What is disability?	1
Session 2: Disability in the Old Testament	5
Session 3: Disability and the Kingdom of God	9
Session 4: Disability and the early church	13
Session 5: Disability and today's church	16
Session 6: An inclusive church	19



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Session 1: What is disability?

Participant's handout

Welcome and introductions

If you are in a small group, spend some time introducing yourselves and sharing what you hope to get out of these sessions.

Introduction

This series of studies will help you begin to think about disability and the church. We will explore the social context of disability, what the Bible tells us about disability and disabled people, and then think about what the church might do today to be a place of equal belonging and participation for all.

Each session contains two or three reflections with a number of questions and a moment to hold all you have heard and shared before God. It is important in your discussions (if you are in a small group) that you make time and space for everyone to be heard. The stories, experiences and reflections of any group members who are disabled will be particularly valuable to the group.

These studies will hopefully cause you to begin to think in new ways, but it will not make you into a more open and accessible church. That is a far deeper process that you will need to commit yourself to over an extended period of time. But, as you hear of the injustice that disabled people experience and the church's failure to be truly open to all, along with the Gospel imperative to bring the marginalised into the centre, I hope you will be inspired to seek to become a church that recognises and lives out the truth that God's power is made perfect in weakness and that in God's kingdom, disability is a witness of grace that is essential to the Body of Christ.

Disability today

Listen to the recording of this section or read the text from the leader's guide.

'Many people who regard themselves as not disabled say they are concerned, or even fearful, about meeting disabled people. In fact, 67% (more than 2 out of 3 people) say they are 'uncomfortable' about meeting disabled people.'

Reflection and discussion

If you think you are not disabled, imagine for a moment that you are asked to accompany a disabled person on a journey. What would you think? What would you be worried about?

If you are disabled, think about how you feel when meeting strangers for the first time. What worries you and why? Maybe you have had good and bad experiences with other people.

Take some time to share your thoughts and experiences

What is disability?

Listen to the recording of this section or read the text in the leader's guide.

'Mahatma Gandhi is supposed to have said: "The true measure of any society can be found in how it treats its most vulnerable members." If this is true, then the statistics and the experiences of disabled people in the UK today suggest that our society does not measure up well. Statistics and research reveal that as a nation we are not inclusive or compassionate towards many people who live with disabilities. Our achievement driven, wealth measured society does not value those who cannot take part in the race towards what is judged to be success. Disabled people are pushed to the margins of society, categorised, and denied the opportunities that those who fit society's definition of 'normal' enjoy as a matter of course.'

Questions

1. How does this make you feel?
2. If you are not disabled, have you ever thought that disability brings so much disadvantage and lack of opportunity?
3. If you are disabled, are you able to talk about the disadvantage you have experienced and how this has made you feel?

Models of disability

Listen to the recording of this section or read the text in the leader's guide.

The Medical Model – Disability is a medical problem and requires the cure or correction of physical or cognitive abnormalities so people can live as full a lives as possible.

The Social Model – Impairments are not the cause of disability. Rather people are 'disabled' when society does not allow them to live full lives with their impairments.

The Minority Model – The experience of disability puts people into a minority group with its own culture and story. This should be respected and valued.

'In all of these models, disability is a negative categorisation that indicates that a person has some sort of deficit. Something is missing or not right about them. Or in other words, something has gone wrong. The question this course asks is: Is this right? Is disability something gone wrong, or is there something much more important here. Something that can tell us incredible things about God and creation and our place in all of this.

Questions

1. Has looking at disability from a social model perspective changed your understanding of what disability is?
2. Do you find it surprising that many disabled people would not want to endure lengthy medical treatment in the hope of 'curing' or 'normalising' their body but would rather be allowed to live a full life as a disabled person?
3. What do you think are the barriers and attitudes society presents that cause 'disability,' excluding and inhibiting people whose bodies, senses and minds do not conform to what is called 'normal' from playing a full part in society?

Time to reflect

Psalm 8

O LORD, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth! You have set your glory
above the heavens.

From the lips of children and infants you have ordained praise because of your enemies,
to silence the foe and the avenger.

When I consider your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars,
which you have set in place.

What are we that you are mindful of us,
our children that you care for them?
You made us a little lower than the heavenly beings
and crowned us with glory and honour.
You made us rulers over the works of your hands;
you put everything under our feet:
all flocks and herds, and the beasts of the field,
the birds of the air, and the fish of the sea,
all that swim the paths of the seas.
O LORD, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth!

At the centre of this Psalm, in verses 4 and 5, we read that God is mindful of us and cares for us, and we have been crowned with glory and honour. There is no caveat to this revelation. It does not say, 'you are mindful of some of us and care about some of us and crown some of us with glory and honour but some of us remain outside of this blessing.' No, it simply says that all human beings, all children born to human parents, are held in the mind of God who cares for us and honours us and crowns us with glory. And this is true no matter who we are and no matter how we are embodied. We don't need to be a particular physical shape. We don't need to understand. We don't need to do anything. But God is mindful of all of us. He cares for all of us. He has crowned each of us with glory and honour. And that must mean that disabilities are equally a revelation of God's glory as are abilities. It must mean that the child with profound intellectual disabilities is equally able to bring God into our midst as is the eloquent preacher or spirit filled worship leader. It must mean that every disabled person, alongside every person who regards themselves as not disabled, has a contribution to make to the revelation of God's glory in his church.

The problem is that the church has lost sight of this truth. It has lost sight of this truth and been distracted by the secular view that disability is deficit, something missing, a negative experience. The unique opportunity that we have in the church though is to model a new understanding. To show the world something that is truly counter-cultural and prophetic. Prophetic of the kingdom banquet that is to come where all people, disabled and non-disabled, gather around the table in the presence of the God who crowns us with glory and honour and through our abilities and disabilities is fully revealed amongst us. In these sessions we will explore something of what this might mean for us as individuals and for the church.

Read the psalm again and see if it comes to life in a new way for you. Then spend some time in silence before you share your thoughts

Pray



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Disability and the church

Session 2: Disability in the Old Testament

Participants handout

Begin by sharing your reflections on the last session

In this session we will reflect on three Old Testament passages that lead us to an understanding of disability as an aspect of our human identity and our relationship with God.

Made in God's image

Listen to the recording of this section or read the text in the leader's guide.

Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, in our likeness, and let them rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the livestock, over all the earth, and over all the creatures that move along the ground." So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; 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 of the sea and the birds of the air and over every living creature that moves on the ground."

Genesis 1:26-28

Questions:

1. When you think about God, what images does your mind create? How do you embody God in your imagination? Do you think the way you imagine God diminishes or restricts your ability to appreciate the 'otherness' of God?
2. What do you think is meant by the 'image of God' in this passage from Genesis? How do you think God has made humankind in his image?
3. Do you think that disabled people might be able to reveal something of God's 'otherness' in the way they 'live and move and have their being'?

God looks at the heart

Listen to the recording of this section or read the text in the leader's notes.

'When they arrived, Samuel saw Eliab and thought, "Surely the Lord's anointed stands here before the LORD." But the LORD said to Samuel, 'Do not consider his appearance or his height, for I have rejected him. The LORD does not look at the things man looks at. Man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart.'"

(1 Samuel 16:6-7)

Questions:

1. We live in a society in which outward appearance is greatly valued and in which some people pay a fortune to look what is judged to be 'good' or 'right.' How do you think this focus on ideal bodies makes disabled people feel? If you are disabled, how does it make you feel?
2. Do you think disabled people are given enough recognition and value in the church? If you are disabled, can you share your experience?
3. Have you experienced leadership or ministry from a disabled minister? If so, how did you feel? If you have never known a disabled minister, do you think you would find this challenging or easy to accept?

A disabled Messiah.

Listen to the recording of this section or read the text in the leader's guide

Who has believed our message and to whom has the arm of the LORD been revealed? He grew up before him like a tender shoot, and like a root out of dry ground. He had no beauty or majesty to attract us to him, nothing in his appearance that we should desire him. He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows, and familiar with suffering. Like one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not.

(Isaiah 53:1-3)

Time to reflect

Take some time to think about this. Suffering and disability is central to the action of salvation that God entrusts to Jesus. The disabling wounds of crucifixion that Jesus as the suffering servant will endure become part of God. Disability becomes part of God. Maybe even, God becomes disabled in the nail torn and whip scourged flesh of Jesus. As many disabled people live lives of marginalisation, pain and discomfort, God lives again and again the pain of crucifixion in their wounds and impairments. But, as Isaiah foresees in his suffering servant prophecy, it is the wounded and disabled God who then cries out to all

people: 'Come. Come to me all who are weary and burdened and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest.'

Read the words of Isaiah 53 slowly and ponder how our disabled God brings wholeness in the midst of our brokenness, healing in the midst of our infirmity, joy in the midst of our sadness and life in the midst of our journey towards death.

Who has believed our message
and to whom has the arm of the LORD been revealed?
He grew up before him like a tender shoot,
and like a root out of dry ground.
He had no beauty or majesty to attract us to him,
nothing in his appearance that we should desire him.
He was despised and rejected by men,
a man of sorrows, and familiar with suffering.
Like one from whom men hide their faces he was despised,
and we esteemed him not.
Surely he took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows,
yet we considered him stricken by God,
smitten by him, and afflicted.
But he was pierced for our transgressions,
he was crushed for our iniquities;
the punishment that brought us peace was upon him,
and by his wounds we are healed.
We all, like sheep, have gone astray,
each of us has turned to his own way;
and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all.
He was oppressed and afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth;
he was led like a lamb to the slaughter,
and as a sheep before her shearers is silent,
so he did not open his mouth.
By oppression and judgment he was taken away.
And who can speak of his descendants?
For he was cut off from the land of the living;
for the transgression of my people he was stricken.
He was assigned a grave with the wicked,
and with the rich in his death, though he had done no violence,
nor was any deceit in his mouth.
Yet it was the LORD's will to crush him and cause him to suffer,
and though the LORD makes his life a guilt offering,
he will see his offspring and prolong his days,
and the will of the LORD will prosper
After the suffering of his soul,
he will see the light of life and be satisfied;
by his knowledge my righteous servant will justify many,
and he will bear their iniquities.
Therefore I will give him a portion among the great,
and he will divide the spoils with the strong,

because he poured out his life unto death,
and was numbered with the transgressors.
For he bore the sin of many,
and made intercession for the transgressors.

In this suffering servant, this suffering Messiah, disabled lives become holy lives. They become lives in which the image of God comes sharply into focus. Disabled lives are redeemed from the place of marginalisation, where they are devalued and passed by, and are brought into the very centre of God's new kingdom. What can the church do to be the place where this truth is revealed?

Spend a few minutes in silence and then share your thoughts.

Pray



Strength made perfect
Disability and the church

Session 3: Disability and the Kingdom of God

Participants handout

Welcome and reflections on last week

This week we will look at the Gospels and the book of Revelation to see how disability fits into the Kingdom that Jesus came to proclaim.

Jesus and healing

Listen to the recording of this section or read the text in the leader's guide

A woman was there who had been subject to bleeding for twelve years. She had suffered a great deal under the care of many doctors and had spent all she had, yet instead of getting better she grew worse. When she heard about Jesus, she came up behind him in the crowd and touched his cloak, because she thought, "If I just touch his clothes, I will be healed." Immediately her bleeding stopped and she felt in her body that she was freed from her suffering. At once Jesus realised that power had gone out from him. He turned around in the crowd and asked, "Who touched my clothes?" "You see the people crowding against you," his disciples answered, "and yet you can ask, 'Who touched me?'" But Jesus kept looking around to see who had done it. Then the woman, knowing what had happened to her, came and fell at his feet and, trembling with fear, told him the whole truth. He said to her, "Daughter, your faith has healed you. Go in peace and be freed from your suffering."

Mark 5:25-34

Questions

1. Have you ever experienced prayer for healing in church or somewhere else? If so, how did it make you feel? If you are disabled, how would you feel about someone offering to pray for you?

2. What do you think about the idea of the difference between healing and cure? Have you ever felt a sense of healing in the middle of the experience of sickness or disability? If you are disabled, are you able to find a sense of peace and wholeness in your disability?
3. How do you feel when you read the miracle stories from the Gospels? Some think that the lack of miracles today is a sign of our lack of faith. Do you think this could be true? If you are disabled, do the miracles cause you to question where God is in your experience?

The disabled Christ- the wounds of resurrection

Listen to the recording of this section or read the text in the leader's guide

On the evening of that first day of the week, when the disciples were together, with the doors locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you!" After he said this, he showed them his hands and side. The disciples were overjoyed when they saw the Lord. Again Jesus said, "Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you." And with that he breathed on them and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive anyone his sins, they are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven." Now Thomas (called Didymus), one of the Twelve, was not with the disciples when Jesus came. So the other disciples told him, "We have seen the Lord!" But he said to them, "Unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe it."

A week later his disciples were in the house again, and Thomas was with them. Though the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you!" Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe." Thomas said to him, "My Lord and my God!" Then Jesus told him, "Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed."

John 20:19-29

Questions:

1. Have you ever thought about the significance of the risen Jesus still bearing the wounds of crucifixion? How significant do you think this is? Would it be different if Jesus' resurrection body had been perfect and flawless with all marks and wounds removed?
2. How do you feel about calling God 'disabled?' Does it change your understanding of what or who God is? Does it make you feel uncomfortable when what is often viewed as a negative human experience is attributed to God? If you are disabled, how does it make you feel to realise that God shares your experience of disability?

3. Do you think that this should change the position of disabled people in the church? What do you think this might mean? If you are disabled, do you think your body could bear witness to the wounds of the risen Jesus in a special way?

A new creation

Listen to the recording of this section or read the text in the leader's guide

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away." He who was seated on the throne said, "I am making everything new!" Then he said, "Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true." He said to me: "It is done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End. To him who is thirsty I will give to drink without cost from the spring of the water of life. They who overcome will inherit all this, and I will be their God and they will be my child.

Revelation 21:1-7

Time to reflect

Spend some time in silence and ask God to highlight some of the new and challenging things you have heard in this session.

The final image is of the new creation. An experience in which there is no more death or mourning or crying or pain. An experience in which everything is made new. And yet an experience in which the full variety and diversity of our human experience is still present. Present, yet redeemed to be essential to the fullness and glory of the new creation.

Our tears are wiped away, but the full contingency of who we are is not, and that includes our disabilities. Our disabilities though are joined to the wounds of Jesus and, just like his wounds are glorified, so we will share in that glory. The blind, the Deaf, the lame, the disfigured, the cognitively and intellectually disabled, the full range of neuro diversity, all aspects of mental illness and more. The human wounds

and scars that we all bear, in some way become part of the new creation and we will be set free to be children of God in all of our variety and diversity.

How can disability in the church today be a prophetic sign of this truth?

How does the church fail disabled people and stifle their prophetic contribution to our mission and witness?

Can you imagine a church in which disabled people are fully liberated and set free to participate and belong equally with all others?

Hold these questions in silence for a few moments and then share any thoughts that have come to mind.

Prayer



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Disability and the church

Session 4: Disability and the early church

Participant's handout

Welcome and time to reflect on the previous session

In this session we will explore what the Bible tells us about disability and the early church. Does this tell us that the church should be an experience in which disabled people can fully belong and participate and find freedom from marginalisation and restriction? Or should the church be striving for a perfection that does not include disability?

The Day of Pentecost

Listen to the recording of this section or read the text in the leader's guide

When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place. Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting. They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them.

Then Peter stood up with the Eleven, raised his voice and addressed the crowd: "Fellow Jews and all of you who live in Jerusalem, let me explain this to you; listen carefully to what I say. These men are not drunk, as you suppose. It's only nine in the morning! No, this is what was spoken by the prophet Joel:

"In the last days, God says, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your young men will see visions, your old men will dream dreams. Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days, and they will prophesy.

And everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.'

Acts 2:1-4, 14-18, 21

Questions

1. We always talk about the Day of Pentecost forming a new, radical and diverse community of believers from all over the Roman world. Have you ever considered that this diversity extended to disability as well?
2. This multi-sensory Pentecost experience was accessible to all people regardless of their disabilities. Everyone was swept up in the experience. Do you think this challenges our idea of church today where intellectual and physical ability is required to fully engage and take part?
3. Disability is no barrier to the Holy Spirit. The prophetic voice and gifts of the Spirit are given equally to disabled and able. Do you think the church is equipped to listen to the prophetic witness of disabled people, or has the intellectual and cerebral experience that we have turned the church into silenced these voices?

We are the body of Christ

Listen to the recording of this section or read the text in the leader's guide

'The body is a unit, though it is made up of many parts; and though all its parts are many, they form one body. So it is with Christ.'

1 Corinthians 12:12

Questions

1. The bodies of disabled people are often uncomfortable, sometimes dysfunctional and chaotic, for some, painful and ugly. What do you think disabled bodies and minds could bring to the Body of Christ in the church that could enrich our ministry and witness to the world?
2. We often strive for perfection in our worship, the music, the setting, the words and presentation. The involvement of disabled people may disrupt that perfection and bring something challenging and uncomfortable into our worship. Do you think this could be a good thing?
3. What do you think people with profound intellectual disabilities could bring to the church? People who struggle to understand (or do not understand at all) the basics of faith and yet demonstrate a love for God and the church community.

A thorn in the flesh - My power is made perfect in weakness

Listen to the recording of this section or read the text in the leader's guide

'To keep me from becoming conceited because of these surpassingly great revelations, there was given me a thorn in my flesh, a messenger of Satan, to torment me. Three times I pleaded with the Lord to take it away from me. But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness."

2 Corinthians 12:7-10

Time to reflect

In a world where strength, wealth, power, achievement, status, authority and ability are celebrated and applauded, we as the Body of Christ in the church are called to look at things very differently. We are called to see that it is in weakness, poverty, impotence, loss, insignificance, service and disability that true power is manifest. The power that is made perfect in weakness.

What would a church that really understood this and acted on it be like?

What would have to change if we want to know the power that is made perfect in weakness?

Spend a few moments reflecting on this, then read Philippians 2:5-11

Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death — even death on a cross!

Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

Philippians 2:5-11

Spend a few moments sharing your thoughts.

Pray



Strength made perfect
Disability and the church

Session 5: Disability and today's church

Participant's handout

Welcome and time to reflect on the last session.

This week we will be thinking about the church today and why it is that disabled people find themselves disadvantaged and marginalised.

Finding grace

Listen to the recording of this section or read the text in the leader's guide

Now this is our boast: Our conscience testifies that we have conducted ourselves in the world, and especially in our relations with you, in the holiness and sincerity that are from God. We have done so not according to worldly wisdom but according to God's grace.

2 Cor 1:12

Questions

1. Do you recognise the economy of exchange in the society in which you live? If you can, what can you identify that tells you this? If you are disabled, can you share your experience of living with your disability within this secular economy of exchange?
2. Do you think your church is operating in the economy of exchange or the economy of grace? What signs do you see or experiences have you had that influence your opinion?
3. What about you personally? Can you identify ways in which you make judgements and ascribe greater or lesser value to people because of their personal qualities and attributes?

Commodity or community?

Listen to the recording of this section or read the text in the leader's guide

"My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me. I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one: I in them and you in me. May they be brought to complete unity to let the world know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.

John 17:20-23

Questions

1. How does all this make you feel? Do you think a radical reimagining of what the church is in the light of 'my ability is made perfect in your disability' could be transformative?
2. What do you think is at the centre of your church? A striving for power or an acceptance of weakness?
3. What do you think your church could do to bring disability and disabled people into the centre and model the radical economy of grace in your parish?

Time to reflect

A voice from the margins

Two thousand years ago a young pregnant teenage girl uttered the words that sparked the coming of the Kingdom of God. This was Mary, pregnant after the annunciation, living on the edge, disgraced, frightened. In danger of being rejected by her husband to be and ostracised by her family. As a woman, she was already on the edge of society. As a pregnant unmarried teenager, she is slipping out of the area of normalcy and acceptability.

And yet it is from here that she proclaims the kingdom that is coming. The kingdom she knew would be fulfilled through the child she is carrying.

Read these words spoken from the margins. Spoken by the excluded and marginalised, and let Mary's vision of the kingdom come alive in you today.

My soul glorifies the Lord
and my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour,
for he has been mindful of the humble state of his servant. From now on all generations will
call me blessed,
for the Mighty One has done great things for me —
holy is his name.
His mercy extends to those who fear him,
from generation to generation.
He has performed mighty deeds with his arm;
he has scattered those who are proud in their inmost thoughts.
He has brought down rulers from their thrones
but has lifted up the humble.
He has filled the hungry with good things
but has sent the rich away empty.
He has helped his servant Israel, remembering to be merciful
to Abraham and his descendants for ever,
even as he said to our fathers."

This first whisper that the kingdom long-promised is here, is uttered by a weak and
vulnerable girl from a place of marginalisation and isolation. What kingdom truths are in the
mouths of the marginalised and disregarded today? And are we ready to hear what they
have to say?

Spend some time in silence reflecting on this.

Share your thoughts.

Prayer



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Disability and the church

Session 6: An inclusive church

Participant's handout

Welcome and time to reflect on the last session.

In this final session we will be imagining a model of church and community that might enable us to be the truly united and inclusive church that we are called to be.

The Limits Model.

Listen to the recording of this section or read the text in the leader's guide

'The limits model challenges the deficit model, suggesting that disability is not something that exists solely as a negative experience of limitation but rather that it is an intrinsic, unsurprising, and valuable element of human limit-ness..... A limits perspective, rather than leading us toward fragmentation or universality, can instead offer a common ground for conversation and become a productive datum for theological reflection.'

(Deborah Creamer, Disability and Christian theology, P96)

Questions

1. In what ways are you limited and what do you think about your limitations? We often think it is our gifts that bring sacred potential into our lives and to the church. What do you think of the idea that your limits could also offer sacred potential?
2. Has there ever been a time when a limitation you experience has sparked an encounter or relationship that has been unexpectedly fruitful? If you are disabled, can you remember a time when your disability has been the catalyst for an encounter when God has been revealed?
3. What difference do you think it would make in your church and/or in society if people were willing to own and share their limits and limitations and allow them to be places of social and sacred encounter?

The limitness paradigm

Listen to the recording of this section or read the text in the leader's guide

'Your limitness is the shape of your life, and if you are going to realise the full sacred potential that God has blessed you with, you need to learn to fully inhabit your limitness. That means that each of us need to learn how to live at our limits rather than living our lives only in our comfortable centre. Disability means that people have to live at their limits for much of their lives. Their disability, their limit, is an ever present experience that they cannot escape from. The thing is though that our limits are the place of divine sacred encounter, not just for disabled people but for all of us. It is when we walk at our limits, when we inhabit and expose our limits to each other that we find the sparks of God begin to fly. It is our limits, or the interfaces and interactions between each of our limitness shapes, that creates the ground and potential for divine sacred encounter.'

Questions

1. Can you relate to your life being an experience of 'limitness'? Do you think your limitations could be a catalyst for God to be revealed in you and others?
2. Has there ever been a time when you have been vulnerable but found that this was an opportunity for the work of God to be displayed in your life and the world? If you are disabled, has your disability brought about encounters in which you have felt the presence of God?
3. What do you think a church built on the paradigm of limitness might be like?

If these sessions have inspired you to want to explore more aspects of accessibility and inclusion, you might like to look at the Diocese of London Disability Ministry webpage for more resources to help you explore what this might mean for you and your church.

Conclusion

These six sessions have been an introduction to thinking about disability and the church. They are not an end in themselves but only have any worth if they have sparked in you an impulse to discover more. They have only been of any worth if they have left you knowing that it is time for the church to both reflect and change the way in which disabled people belong to and participate in the life and worship of the church.

For too long disabled people have been marginalised and viewed as needy by the church. Their prophetic call and witness to the radical, counter-cultural kingdom that is founded in the economy of grace has been ignored. For too long the church has run after power and status and influence rather than recognising that weakness is the route to real power. The power of God that is made perfect in our weakness. For too long the church has been

buying into the secular economy of exchange and mirroring the cult of normalcy that rejects so many people.

The paradigm of limitness creates a framework to counter all of this. It demolishes the dualism that is at the heart of the economy of exchange and the cult of normalcy. It has the potential to be the foundation of a truly counter-cultural church that brings the Kingdom of God alive afresh for this generation.

Some words of blessing

May the God who gives endurance and encouragement give you a spirit of unity among yourselves as you follow Christ Jesus, so that with one heart and mouth you may glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God.

Romans 15:5-7

Share the standout thoughts and ideas you will take away from these sessions.

What will you do with them?

Pray