**GCCHM Leadership Certification**

**Level VII, Course #4**

**DISBILITIES AND FAITH**

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**(Presenter’s Notes)**

**INTRODUCTION**

For parents with a disabled child, is God really there? Does He still listen to their prayers? Will He answer their pleading and prayers?

Is healing the only thing God has to offer for people with disabilities? If they are not healed, does this mean they do not have God’s favor?

For many parents with a disabled child, these questions haunted them. Their child loves Jesus but he has cerebral palsy. His parents craved healing.  They begged for healing. They also wanted to know if their child didn’t get healed, what in this life does God have for him or her?  Is there any examples of people with disabilities not being healed and they still had a blessed life? A life accepted by God?

**MEPHIBOSHETH’S BACKGROUND**

* Son of Jonathan
* He was five years old when the news about Saul and Jonathan came from Jezreel, and his nurse took him up and fled, and as she fled in her haste, he fell and became lame (2 Samuel 4:4).
* His disability was an accident and not a result of sin.
* Did God have a plan for him?

**GOD’S FAVOR POURED OUT IN ABUNDANCE**

In the book of 2 Samuel 9, we meet Mephiboseth and God answers these questions in a beautiful way. God never healed Mephibosheth, but he poured his favor out in abundance.

* God never healed Mephibosheth
* David returned all of his grandfather’s land to him.
* David gave him workers to take care of the land and produce.
* He ate at the king’s table.
* His life had a purpose. It was worth something!

**BARRIERS THAT AFFECT PARENTS’ FAITH**

* Having a disabled child is a punishment for sin.
* My child’s behavior is a result of bad parenting.
* My lack of faith is the reason my child’s disability is not healed.
* I am seen as an object of pity.
* No one invites my children to birthday parties or other activities.

**DISABILITY CULTURE IN AMERICAN SOCIETY**

* They have created a culture of top-down charity, denying disabled people their agency.
* Most financial resources are put into researching a cure rather than improving their daily lives.
* The public discourse about disabilities revolves solely around suffering; the disabled are not seen as multi-dimensional people who experience pain, pleasure, joy, and sadness along with everyone else.

**DISABILITY CULTURE . . .**

* Disabled people are a source of terror; they seem invisible and is seen as worse than death by many non-disabled people.
* Non-disabled people often live in fear of turning out like the disabled, or having children who might be disabled, or even having to interact with the disabled in all of their stimming, spazzing weirdness.

**HELPING PARENTS MAINTAIN FAITH**

1. Admitting Our Powerlessness
2. Living the Questions.
3. Doing the Grief Work.
4. Stopping the Guilt Game.
5. Embracing Our Brokenness.
6. Rearranging the Pieces to Make a New Creation.
7. Celebrate.
8. **ADMITTING OUR POWERLESSNESS**
* “Man is broken. He lives by mending. The grace of God is the *glue*.” Anne Lamott, *Traveling Mercies: Some Thoughts on Faith”*
* After you grieve, pass all your hurt and pain to God.
* Find strength and power in the Scripture and in prayer.
1. **LIVING THE QUESTIONS**
* *Why my child? Has God rejected me? Is disability part of God’s plan? Is this some kind of divine punishment?*
* Wrestle with God as Jacob wrestled with the angel until the break of day (Gen. 32:24-32), for you will be blessed with a new name, a new way of looking at your situation, a new way of being--even with a limp.
1. **DOING THE GRIEF WORK**
* Grieving parents go through the following stages:
* ***Denia****l* – gives the mind time for digest and make sense of an initial diagnosis.
* ***Ange****r* – directed at the doctor who delivered the baby, at God, at the child, and at one’s spouse.
* ***Guilt***– what did I do wrong? Did I exercise too much? Is this God’s punishment for sins I have committed?
* ***Bargaining* –** “Let’s Make a Deal” stage. “Lord if you heal my child, I will follow you all the days of my life.” Or you may bargain with yourself, ”If I do enough hours of research, I know I can find the cure for this disability.”
* ***Depression***– one parent may feel lethargic and can’t complete daily tasks, another may plunge into frantic activity to avoid confronting feelings of sadness and despair.
* ***Acceptance***– able to dream new dreams. Accepting our children just as they are and seeing their many gifts as well as their challenges. Focus on finding the best medical advice, educational settings, and therapies to make our disabled children’s lives as full as possible

 **Elizabeth Kubler-Ross, *On Death & Dying***

1. **STOPPING THE GUILT GAME**
* Guilt creates a black hole in the life of the person who allows it free rein.
* We’re only able to forgive ourselves if we first open ourselves to God’s forgiveness.
* God pitches his tent to dwell with you. When you open yourself up to Him, you will begin to trust Him with your new dream. He will be there with you through this new journey.
1. **EMBRACING THE BROKENNESS**
* Wholeness does not mean perfection: it means embracing brokenness as an integral part of life.
* “The world is broken. We are broken whether it is through our distractive, fragmented lives or war. Taking that which is broken and creating something whole is an act of healing and restoration. Call it reconstruction.” –Terry Tempest Williams.
* Jesus’ healing ministry on earth shows us that God brings all of the broken pieces together again – the lame, blind, crippled, etc.
* “He is before all things, and in him all things hold together,” Colossians 1:17.
* Recognize and accept there is brokenness in the world and in our lives.
* Make something beautiful out of it.

**THE PARABLE OF THE CRACKED POT**

A gardener fills two pots with water each morning to water his garden. One of the pots is cracked, however, and slowly dribbles its water away by the time it reaches the vegetables. Day after day this happens, until the pot feels utterly useless.

Feeling ashamed, he cries out to the gardener, “Oh, the disgrace of it! Wasted precious water, letting you down, master, never fulfilling the purpose for which you molded me!”

“Look back along the path,” the gardener answers. The pot looks behind him and sees that a profusion of blooming flowers along one side of the path.

“You see,” the gardener says, “you have fulfilled your destiny. I knew you had a crack, so I planted these seeds which have taken root and bloomed. Thanks to the water you slowly release on our walk to the vegetables each morning.”

1. **REARRANGING THE PIECES TO MAKE A NEW CREATION**
* Enjoy routine activities and find spiritual meaning in it – take a walk, ride bike, or sit in the yard.
* Cultivate gratitude as you watch nature’s beauty.
* Make a list of simple gifts that you receive from God. Every time you do that, you are making new neural pathways in your brain, muscle memory is growing stronger. The eyes of your heart are strengthened to see what the Lord is trying to tell you—that He loves you and want to gift you on a moment-by-moment basis.

**7. CELEBRATE**

* Nehemiah reminds us that “the joy of the Lord is our strength,” (Nehemiah 8:10).
* Apostle Paul counsels us: “Rejoice in the Lord always. Again, I will say, rejoice! Let your gentleness be known to all men. The Lord is at hand. Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, let your requests to made know to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.

**HOW TO CELEBRATE**

* Focus on the positive – “Do not be confirmed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind” (Romans 12:2).
* Join Praise Cruises, singing and worship activities, festivals, etc.
* Recognize that 1) life is not what we had planned and 2) we need amazing fluidity and resiliency of spirit to survive the ongoing cycles of love and loss, gratitude and frustration while searching for diagnoses, services, programs, and mountains of red tape.

***Find your joys and comfort from the Source beyond yourself. Look with a new attitude and perceive new mosaics in the blessings and broken pieces of your lives. Enjoy and celebrate your child with special needs.***

***Find your own rhythm, art form or song.***