

Making Providence a More Welcoming Place

A More Welcoming Place

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Turn with me in your Bibles to Romans 12. This is going to be a topical message, but that the main, the key principle that we're going to talk about is from Romans 12:2. I want to say thank you to all folks that took the survey. It's an unusual situation we have today, I'm actually preaching messages that today and next Sunday that are related to the project that I've done in school which is an attempt to be a blessing to the church by dealing with a practical issue, and the issue that we're going to be dealing with these next two Sundays and next Saturday is the issue of disabilities and making a Providence Church a more welcoming place to persons with disabilities. It's interesting when you even say that; it seems like it doesn't fit to make Providence a more welcoming place to anybody seems like that's unnecessary. Loving church that we have, the grace of God that's at work in this congregation and we certainly intend to be welcoming to persons with disabilities and every Christian would want to be, every true believer would want to be, but in reality, one of the things that we see is that the evangelical church, by and large, is one of the most unwelcoming places to persons with disabilities. Survey after survey, expert after expert are in agreement that despite our intentions, we're just not a place that persons with disabilities find welcoming.

And so the purpose of my project is to achieve that goal, to help us to really examine and reform some underlying beliefs that we have formed, to cultivate godly attitudes and to develop more sound relational habits. Essentially, what's happened to us, and this is essentially the reality of what's true of the Christian life in every circumstance, that if you are not being transformed actively by the power of the word of God, you are inevitably being conformed to this world. So the reason that the church is not, the evangelical church at large, the Bible-believing church at large is not welcoming as it would intend to be to persons with disabilities is because we've not let the word transform us in this area. There's not been enough teaching and preaching on these important subjects and therefore the inevitable result is conformity to the world in ways we don't even intend or realize.

I mentioned it's really in all of the literature, every author. I mentioned last Sunday that at the December of 2017 I went to the Biblical Counseling Coalition Summit in Rome, GA, and that, the purpose of that summit was to talk about this issue. Joni Eareckson Tada, well-known quadriplegic, Godly woman, director of Joni and Friends, a ministry to

disabilities that has touched virtually every part of the globe. Joni Eareckson Tada was there and she shared her testimony and the essential message that she and the people with her were bringing to biblical counselors, ACBC counselors, Association of Certified Biblical Counseling. I know we say those, we throw out the alphabet soup, sometimes it's hard to remember what's what. We talk a lot about ACBC, that's what we, how kind of we look to that organization as a real source of instruction for us as we understand what counseling is and what discipleship is and what it means to live for Christ. Well, they were there and CCEF, Christian Counseling Education Foundation in Philadelphia, another strong organization, and other counselors from all over the country and essentially the message of Joni Eareckson Tada and the folks from Joni and Friends was, will you please start working and digging and teaching about disabilities to minister to persons with disabilities and to help the church become a more welcoming place to persons with disabilities?

And the good news, there's been a lot of books that have come out in just the last couple of years. It's almost like every few months a new one comes out because people are beginning to dig into the Scriptures and look at this issue. And this is how God works, because when you look at the numbers, the reality is that persons with disabilities are underrepresented in the modern church in America. That is that estimates vary, but about 10% of people in the country have a significant disability, that is a physical or intellectual disability. A disability is defined as a physical or mental impairment which significantly impacts normal life, major life activities. The normal disabilities that probably come to mind or the physical disabilities: blindness, deafness, physical mobility issues, paraplegia, quadriplegia, intellectual disabilities, that is that disabilities of mind where the brain does not function properly, there's difficulty processing, reasoning, Down Syndrome, developmental issues, brain injury, autism.

And so 10% of the population are people with disabilities and yet you don't find that number of people within the church and it's completely counter intuitive. In fact, if you really think about it, wouldn't you expect to find more people with disabilities in the church than you find in the culture because God is a God who looks to the widow and the orphan, or as 1 Corinthians 1:26 says, "Remember your calling, that not many of you were wise, not many of you were noble, not many of you were mighty but God has chosen the weak things of the world, the despised things that He might show His glory and that man may not boast except in the Lord." And so as I pondered that since 2017, it's weighed on my heart, and I thought to myself, I don't intend to be a person who is unwelcoming, but as I've examined my life and my beliefs, underlying beliefs and attitudes and relational habits, I've seen that I am. You know, the ways that we can be unwelcoming are subtle. You know, maybe it's staring at someone longer than you should because you're just surprised to see the disabled person, the person with disabilities. Or another person averts their eyes quickly and won't make eye contact, avoids. Or when we speak to a family with maybe shows up at the church with a person with disabilities, it's very common for us to speak to everyone except the person with disabilities, to not address them directly. People talk to the parent or talk to the loved one or the opposite end is to be paternalistic and to overdo our emphasis and to make them unwelcome in that way, to say things like well-intentioned things like, "You're an inspiration to me that

you're coming to church in your condition." And so we miss the mark because we don't think biblically about these issues. They're underrepresented in the church and when they are in the church, when persons with severe disabilities, it's unusual for a person with disabilities to be involved as well as other non-disabled members.

So underrepresented, under-involved. This is the concern and kind of the consensus of godly leaders who've been looking at this issue, and as I've talked with pastor friends, they agree. I mean, the Lord has blessed us with persons with disabilities, but not as many as we should expect. So this is the focus of this series today and tomorrow and then next Saturday there's a seminar from 8:30 to 2:30. I want to say thank you to everyone who's filled out the survey. Over 90 people had filled out the survey by this morning since Friday evening. I got the approval Friday right before 6:00. I told Bethany if I don't get approval by 6:00 PM, we're pushing it back and it came in at like 5:00 o'clock. So anyway, praise the Lord for that. But I really believe this is going to help us because it helps us think better about every other person because in reality, in reality, the biblical view is every one of us is disabled. We're on a continuum. Even physically we're all disabled. Think about it. As I get older, I'm more and more aware of how we are disabled. We are dying as we age. Our bodies are breaking down. This is an effect of sin. This was not what we were created to be. But even more so, we are spiritually disabled. Profound spiritual disabilities and inability to know and love God, an inability to obey God. "The natural man does not submit to the law of God, nor indeed can he," Romans 8. And so I want to talk to us about this unintentional but inevitable blind spot, and to encourage you to really examine your heart under the word and to see where you can change beliefs and attitudes and actions. So making Providence a more welcoming place and making our hearts more welcoming to persons with disabilities, that's the theme of the message today.

Romans 12:2 shows us this inevitable result of not being, not always filling your mind and letting the words shape our thinking. When we don't do that, there are consequences. Romans 12:2,

2 And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect.

Let's go to the Lord in prayer.

Our Father, how grateful we are for Your word. We thank You that You have not left us in the dark, the darkness of our own sin, the darkness of this world where the god of this age is blinded the eyes of the unbelieving. He is the Prince of Darkness. But You have shined Your light through Christ and through the word that shows us the glory of Jesus and we pray today that You would take Your word and apply it to our hearts and our lives. Search us and know us and see if there be any wicked way in us, and lead us in the way everlasting. For Jesus' sake, we pray in His name. Amen.

So this inevitable reality that we would be unwelcoming, more unwelcoming than we intend, is really the result of the conforming power of the world. That's the first point. There are two points this morning, two main points and then some subpoints. The first main point, it answers the question: how did we get here? How did it happen that persons with disabilities feel more welcome other places than they do at church? Well, the answer is the conforming power of the world. That's the first point.

Romans 12:2 says, "do not be conformed to this world." The tense in the Greek, the original language, is a Greek present tense. It means do not go on being conformed. Greek present tense means continuous action, and so when Paul used the Greek present here, he had the idea of the conforming process is an ongoing process, a continual, ongoing process that we must actively resist or it will have its effect. You could translate it, "stop being conformed or do not go on being conformed to this world." It pictures the world, this age, as an organized intentional force that is trying to conform the minds of believers into its image. The god of this age, Satan, is the one who is working here. Sin is working.

And so if we're not being transformed by the renewing our minds, then it is inevitable that we will be conformed. This is why we like to, one of our favorite or one of my favorite sayings is, "Semper Reformanda." You know, everybody needs a favorite Latin saying. What's yours? No, but Semper Reformanda means always reforming. You've seen the phrase or the bumper sticker, "Semper Fi," that's a marine bumper sticker, always faithful. Well, Semper Reformanda is always reforming, that the call of the Christian life is to always be reforming by the power of the word of God. You're saved, you're born again, when you come to Jesus you're given a new heart but now the calling is to actively resist, actively and intentionally resist the conforming pressure of the world and the only way you do that is by the transforming power of the word. But if we don't actively resist it, if we don't intentionally resist it, we find ourselves conformed.

The same idea is in a number of places, Colossians 2:8 says, the Apostle Paul reminds the Colossians that they are in the predicament they are because they've been listening to the world and not actively resisting the world. He says in Colossians 2:8, "See to it that no one takes you captive through philosophy and empty deception, according to the tradition of men, according to the elementary principles of the world, rather than according to Christ." That be aware that there is a force, there are, you know, forces at work that want to take you captive, and the way Satan takes us captive is through our thinking, through philosophy and empty deception according to the tradition of men, the same way that the conforming of Romans 12:2 happens, it happens in our minds.

Another passage that speaks to the same issue as 2 Corinthians 10:3-5, a familiar passage where the Apostle Paul says, "For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh, for the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh, but divinely powerful for the destruction of fortresses. We are destroying," listen what it is to destroy fortresses, "we are destroying speculations and every lofty thing raised up against the knowledge of God, and we are taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ." The way conformity happens is it happens through thoughts and ideas that we're inundated with in

the world system. Our flesh resonates with them and we imbibe them, and we embrace them, and these thought forms then become beliefs, and these beliefs shape attitudes, and the attitudes end up resulting in actions in the way that we respond to others.

This is how the heart is conformed to the world and the way that you the, the spiritual warfare that he's really using warfare imagery, the weapons of our warfare Paul says in verse 4, 2 Corinthians 10, the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh but are spiritual and mighty to the destruction of fortresses. That image is powerful, especially to the Corinthians, because there was a huge mountain, there is still this huge mountain outside of Corinth in Greece, and on top of that mountain at the time Paul wrote Corinthians was the Acropolis of Corinth, a mighty fortress that was used by the various ruling kings to control that area. You have, you know, a castle like that castle, and you garrison it with soldiers, then you can control a whole area of territory. There's an invader, they leave the castle, they go out and attack and they come back to the castle and so they control a much bigger area than just the footprint of that castle. So he's saying that wrong thought-forms, speculations, that is reasonings, the word speculations in verse 4, we're destroying speculations, is the word logismos, which means like you may have heard the word logic in that, logismos, the reasonings of the world. The reason strongholds have happened is because we've accepted the world's reasonings, the world's ideas, the way the world thinks, and those things have become controlling in us, that they're like a fortress, they're like a castle that must be overtaken. It must be demolished, and that castle being demolished happens through bringing the word of God to bear on that.

So that's the picture you see. The conforming power of the world is something that the New Testament is teaching us we must resist. We have in our lives, these fortresses that must be torn down. This is what sanctification is. It's learning the truth, and it's learning to walk in the truth, like Jesus said, you make disciples, what do you do? You baptize them, and you teach them to observe all that I've commanded you. It's the word of God. It's the word of God. It's the word of God. So these values of the world and beliefs of the world have shaped us, and they've affected us so that we are no longer, or we're not what we should be. We're not welcoming as we should be.

I want to show you this. Stephanie Hubach in her book "Same Lake, Different Boat," an excellent book on living with disabilities, she makes an insightful observation about how the worldview of the surrounding society in Western culture has really affected us profoundly. And she points out how modernism, the worldview of modernism or the enlightenment worldview, the modern worldview, has impacted our thinking in dramatic ways. She also talks about postmodernism, but I'm not going to talk about that today. I'm just going to share about modernism and then I'm going to contrast that with the biblical worldview. But I commend her book to you because it's also interesting how she sees how postmodernism also messes up our thinking.

But the modern worldview, this is the conforming power of the world. Well, what is the world conforming us to? In the 1600s, the Enlightenment began to take an increasingly dominant role in Western society. The Enlightenment was an optimistic worldview. It's a view that has a high view of man and his abilities. Man is the measure of all things was

an Enlightenment concept. A high view of reason. A high view of empiricism. A high view of man's abilities. It's the idea that man can, we can perfect society, we can perfect even ourselves. This was the dominant view all the way up till probably World War I and then it still has impact even past that dramatically but it was on an upward march from 1600s all the way up to World War I, probably, and World War I set it back. Maybe we can't fix everything like we thought we could. But it's still here because people think they can perfect themselves. This is the idea that you can, man can overcome all of his enemies, even death.

I mean, think about how this this idea of man and his greatness, that man can find truth by himself, he doesn't need revelation, and then you add into things like the industrial revolution, the rise of technology, the rise of modern science, and we can figure it all out. Look what we now know. The rise of modern medicine, the lengthening of the lifetime, because of that. You add in a little Darwinian evolution and you see how profoundly that impacts it. Darwinian evolution, the idea that everything is getting better. You know, that life has evolved from single cell all the way up to what we see now, and it's an onward, upward progression.

This idea of the world, this is what the effect it has on how you see disabilities and Hubach writes this, she says that if you have a modern worldview, the modern worldview sees disabilities as an abnormal part of life in a normal world. An abnormal part of life in a normal world. That's the key phrase, an abnormal part of life in a normal world. That is, that it's normal for everything to be good and to be advancing, and we're moving upward and onward, we're reaching our destiny, we're heading, you know, toward perfection, and in that worldview there is no room for those who are people with disabilities. I mean, disabilities in the modern worldview are tragic. There's a sense in which there's always a sense of brokenness and appropriate mourning, and the Christian worldview sees that. Disabilities are not what God intended us to be and so we can mourn, but we don't mourn as those who have no hope. Modern man mourns and has no hope.

This is what led, this underlying thought process is what led to the eugenics movement of the early 20th century. Eugenics means good genes. It was the idea that man is evolving and so we need to keep working on the purification of humanity, to advance humanity. So the weaker, the idea of Darwinism, survival of the fittest, then the weak and the, you know, the disabled, they don't need to reproduce. And so in the United States of America, tens of thousands of disabled persons were sterilized in the first 60 years of the 20th century. Do you understand that? Sterilized. Made unable to reproduce because of this idea of eugenics. And it happened here. It's the same idea gone to seed that inspired Adolf Hitler to seek the Final Solution to exterminate everyone he saw to be lesser, and to promote those he saw to be greater, the Aryan race. That was the advent, there was a real flowering of the concept of evolution. Hitler was a marvelous Darwinist, a marvelously consistent Darwinist.

You see the evil that comes from wrong worldviews, and there is no place for persons with disabilities in that worldview. And even if the extremes of eugenics are rejected, there's a sense of tragic hopelessness and despair that comes with a diagnosis of prenatal

disabilities. And these things affect us more than we realize because, you know, a fish doesn't know he's wet. If you ask him, "Are you wet?" He wouldn't know he's wet. He only knows that he is what he is. You know, think about this, when you hear someone is having a baby and you hear that their child was born with Down Syndrome, what's your reaction? You hear someone's born with profound disabilities in some other way, or there is an accident that happens and now there is a profound disability that someone is going to live with. Certainly there's a measure of sadness that's appropriate, but so often we betray a modernistic worldview. When someone says something like this, "You know, I heard about the diagnosis of your child. You must be devastated." Think about that. Could you see yourself saying that or thinking that? If so, you're evidencing this modernistic worldview. As I said earlier, we can mourn the reality of disabilities because disability is impairment and it brings suffering. All disabilities bring some measure of suffering and suffering is not good. But we have a context in the word of God to understand how things really are. We know that God has a purpose in these things, and so we don't mourn as those who have no hope.

So the right thing to say is, "I heard about your diagnosis. How are you doing with that?" Not, "You must be devastated." No, you ought not be devastated. I know you're mourning and I'm going to weep with you. I'm not going to start and tell you Romans 8:28 right away. I'm going to see how you're doing, enter into your suffering, mourn with you, but I'm going to mourn as one who has hope. That's the Christian worldview and we must fight to think like that because it impacts the way we see other people, especially those with disabilities. When we see them, if we're not girding up our minds for action, as 1 Peter 1:13 says, gird up your minds for action, if we're not actively thinking the truth, we think like the world and we respond in ways that betray that and that make us unwelcoming.

Now that's the conforming power of the world. The conforming power of the world. I mean, think about it, the world, the people in the world, they're living for this life only. I mean, given their assumptions, they're living consistently. If this world is all there is and you have a child with profound disabilities or you have a profound disability, then that's pretty bad news. But we have a different worldview. We know that this world, this life is just a vapor, that eternity is coming, and that transforms everything. So that leads us to the second point: the transforming power of the word. We said the conforming power of the world, second point, the transforming power of the word. When you understand what the Bible says, remember, I told you disability, I mean, modernism sees disabilities as an abnormal part of life in a normal world, that the world is getting better. It's good. It's only getting better. We're making it better. We're perfecting it, and disabilities are these missteps along the way. An abnormal part of life in a normal world. The biblical view flips that around. The biblical view is this: that disabilities are a normal part of life in an abnormal world. The world itself is fundamentally abnormal. It's not what God intended it to be. There's still beauty, there's still goodness, there's still wonderful glory in the world, but there is also the unmistakable effect of sin everywhere. Sin has marred the beauty. Sin has damaged every single part of creation, and it's damaged every single human being.

So the transforming power of the word shows us that disabilities are a normal part of life in an abnormal world. I want to share with you five subpoints under this point, the transforming power of the word, some concepts that help us to build into our lives and I think what we have to do is we have to think and meditate on these things. It's not enough to know them. It's not enough to just hear the word. We're supposed to be doers of the word, and to be a doer of the word, you not only hear the word and accept it as true, but you meditate on it so that your attitudes are changed, and you act on it. You act consistent with what you know to be true, even at times when you don't feel like it, even at times when you feel like the opposite is true because the word of God alone is true and reliable, much more so than our feelings.

So here are five subpoints, the transforming power of the word. When we look at the Bible, it gives us a context, it transforms the way we see ourselves and others, and particularly those with disabilities. In this first principle I want to share with you is the extraordinary value of every person. The extraordinary value of every single person. Genesis 1:26 and 27. "Then God said, 'Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; and let them rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over the cattle and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.'" Listen to the repetition here in verse 27, "God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them." God made man male and female to be his image. Every single human being was created, this is the purpose for which you were created is to image God, that is, to replicate in some way, some amazing awesome way because the word is used particularly in 1 Samuel 4 where the Philistines make replicas of the plagues that the Lord sent on them when they had the ark of the covenant. They took it back to Philistia to their cities and everywhere they took it, they had plagues of rats and plagues of boils all over the people, and so tumors, and so when they sent it back to God, because they said, "We cannot keep this. We're all going to die." They put replicas of the rats and the tumors, gold replicas in the ark as they sent it back. "We don't want it and this is an offering back to the God of Israel." And the word "replica" there is "image," it's the same word. An image is like a statue is an image. This is the idea. A king in ancient times, an emperor, to remind everyone that he's on the throne of this city that he's not present with would put a statue that would replicate him and show his likeness to the people, and that's the idea of what mankind is, that we are God's image. Somehow you and I reflect and replicate something about the eternal God, and it's true of every single human being without exception.

Now, if you take that and you meditate on that, you don't just say, "Yeah, check. I understand that. I know that doctrine of man. Yes, image of God, imago dei, yeah, got it." No, you think about it, you meditate on it, it changes the way you see other people. It changes the way you see even people that are tough to love, tough to be around. We should always have in our hearts some sense in which we, especially in those moments when we're having trouble, we should be reminding ourselves this is an image-bearer. This is a person of extraordinary value even if they are insulting me, even if they're attacking me, I mean verbally, they're still a person of inestimable value because they are the likeness of God in some way. Even if they're twisting and distorting everything, if they're becoming so committed to sin that they're continuing to become less

human, still there's something there of that image. And there's a sense in which we should stand in awe of that. Wow, the value of this person, and it's true of persons with disabilities. No matter how great the disability, here is a human being formed in the image of God. I'm going to place value on this person. I'm going to honor them. I'm going to stand in awe of them as I ought to every other person.

There's a sense in which we should look for glory in some way, and the Bible says that. Man is the glory of God. Psalm 8. He made us a little lower than the angels, crowned us with glory. That's the first principle, the extraordinary value of every person. The second principle we see in Scripture is the real depravity of every person. The Bible is, I said modernism is optimistic, the Bible is realistic. The Bible tells you things as they truly are. It's not just the optimism of hope, it's the reality that we see confirmed; if you're really looking carefully at the world, the Bible makes sense out of it. No other philosophy, no other religion makes sense out of the world the way the Bible does because it's God's perfect word.

We see the real depravity of every individual. You turn over to chapter 3 of Genesis and we see the fall and the impact of the fall. The moment they sin, their eyes are opened, they know they're naked. There is a break in their relationship with one another. They need to hide from God, a break in their relationship with God, and they begin to die. They die spiritually at that moment and they begin to die physically at that moment. Sin brings death. Romans 5:12 says, "through one man sin entered into the world, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men, because all sinned."

Depravity, death, decay and deformity are all a result of sin. In fact, Romans 8:20, the apostle says that "the creation was subjected to futility." He's talking about why there is suffering, he's helping us to understand suffering in the world and he tells us that, "the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of Him who subjected it, in hope." He's essentially saying this, that when man sinned, God ordained that the world would fall and that the whole creation would experience a radical altering. And it was the will of God. Now, certainly it was just. I mean, it would have been just for him to burn everything up right then. That's what would have been absolutely just, but it was certainly right for him to bring this futility into the world, and the reality is he subjected it to the futility in hope. Futility means emptiness. The world now just doesn't work like it's supposed to.

I see this more than many of you do, I think, and when I'm working around the house, some of you guys may be like me, I often think of the futility that is in this world when I'm trying to fix something. It's gotten to where if it works, I have the right tool and it actually works, I'm surprised. I'm like, "You know, wow, that is alright," because that's normally not the case. It's normally three or four trips to Home Depot and it's, you know, watching a video online and it's not working like that, and it's certainly not working like the instructions tell you in whatever you bought, especially if you bought it down at IKEA. Just forget it. Just burn em and just make the best of it.

But that's a function of futility. Everything doesn't work like it's supposed to. God has let this happen. He ordained it. Why? Because we didn't know what was really broken most of all when man sinned was they immediately lost fellowship with God. That's what he meant, "In the day you eat of it, you will die." And they died at the moment they ate the fruit. Remember their eyes were opened, they saw they were naked, but what did they do when God came in the garden? They hid from him. They had been walking with him in the cool of the day and now they're hiding from God. Radical breach. Now they're rebels. Now they're under God's wrath. And the problem is, sin is so deceitful that we convince ourselves that everything is okay, that we're not that bad, that we can get to heaven on the curve, God grades on the curve. But one of the reasons God subjected the world to futility is so we've been continually reminded of our need of grace. We'd look at the world and say, look what's wrong with this world, and we'd then see that as a mirror to say, look what is wrong with my soul. How broken I am. How in need of grace. And that's true of every single person.

The extraordinary value of every person, secondly, the real depravity of every person, and thirdly, the sovereign creation of every person. This is such an important point. The Bible teaches that every single human being is specifically created by God exactly as he intends them. Even the person with severe disabilities. Now we have to understand that God never intended that disabilities be around in the first place. He made a perfect world and if man had stayed submitted to God, everything would still be perfect but once sin entered the world, God subjected it to futility and one of the things that he subjected in this futility is that even the hope of parents and the delight and expectation of parents and a mother carrying that baby for nine months, and parents looking forward to the birth of that child would experience the futility from time to time of severe disabilities. And all the loved ones around them would experience that and it would be a reminder that something is profoundly wrong with the world.

But the reality is, every single time a child is born, God has specifically created that child, disabilities and all, and we must articulate what the Bible says without apology, with compassion, yes, but with confidence that God's truth always sets free. "You shall know the truth and the truth will make you free." Psalm 139:13-15, David writes these things. He says, "For You formed my inward parts; You wove me in my mother's womb. I will give thanks to You, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made; Wonderful are Your works, And my soul knows it very well." We can imbibe kind of a naturalistic Christian worldview, a deistic Christian worldview that sees that God, well, God started everything but he just lets natural processes take it from there. That's a lie. According to Scripture, God is ordaining and sustaining everything. He creates every child in the womb and then he governs every moment of every person's life through providence, all the way from beginning to end. So every birth defect he says Exodus 4:11, do you remember when Moses was called to go to the Promised Land? God met him in the burning bush, and Moses basically said, "Here am I. Send Aaron." He didn't want to go, and he said, "You know, Lord, I have a speech impediment. You know I can't speak well. Why would You send me to Pharaoh because I can't speak well?" This is what God says, "Who has made the deaf, the dumb and the blind? Did not I, the Lord? Do you think I don't know about

your speech impediment? I wove you in your mother's womb. So do what I'm calling You to do."

So the Lord takes full responsibility for everything that comes to pass. At first glance, that's troubling, I understand. How could God bring this kind of suffering in our lives? But if you will just wait upon the Lord and read the Scriptures, it's clear the Bible rightly interpreted makes that point of the absolute sovereignty of God over and over and over and over again. Only an unbelieving mind, and I'm not saying unchristian because there are a lot of Christians who struggle with the sovereignty of God, but I'm saying only a person who wants not to believe what the Bible clearly teaches can maintain that God just sort of lets things happen.

Lamentations 3:37 and 38 is one of my favorite verses. "Who can speak and it come to pass unless the Lord has commanded it? Out of the mouth of the Most High both good and evil come forth." Now, God is not the author of evil but he is sovereign over it and whenever it happens, it happens according to his plan. Just like Joseph saw in his own life when he told his brothers, "You meant it for evil, but God meant it for good." And when you understand that, there is a stabilizing power to that. It's not, at first glance it seems like how can God love me if he brought this into my life, right? That's what we feel. But we understand, wait a minute, his purposes and his ways are not our ways. His thoughts are not our thoughts. And when you accept his sovereignty and you accept the testimony of the word, then you have an anchor for the soul and then you begin to have some parameters that help you get perspective.

God's purposes are not our purposes and whenever he gives you something that you don't want, if you're a Christian, Romans 8:28 is true, "All things work together for good to those who love God and are called according to his purpose." Now his purpose is to make you like Jesus. Romans 8:32 few verses later says if God did not spare his Son, listen to this argument, if God did not spare his Son but delivered him up for us all, how will he not together with him freely give us all things? He's arguing from the greater to the lesser. He's saying if God gave you Jesus he is only going to give you good things. He proved it by giving you Jesus. What that means is this horrible thing that has happened to me that from my standpoint is horrible, must be God's gracious, good gift to me. For what he calls you to do, he's going to give you grace.

I mentioned Joni Eareckson Tada earlier. She was made a quadriplegic at age 17 when she dove into a pool and a freak accident happened and her neck was broken. And I heard that testimony in 2017. She was at that meeting I mentioned at the beginning. Fifty years, it had been 50 years since she became a quadriplegic and she's testifying to us, talking about what has happened in her life, and part of what she said was, "I wouldn't change anything because I have come to know how wonderful Jesus is. No matter how great your need, Jesus is able to meet it." She knows what it's like to call on Jesus every morning just to give her grace to let the people come in, the church is organized in such a way that they have ladies that come over and they handle bathing and feeding and dressing ritual every single day. And she talked about how she has to ask, she wants to die at times. She feels like, "I can't do another day of quadriplegia, Lord. You're going to have to help me."

And so then by the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, she says, "I'm going to smile at Sally who's coming to take care of me, or Mindy who's coming in to take care of me. I'm going to try to encourage them in You today." And she just clings to Jesus and every day she gets to know how wonderful it is to know a Savior like Jesus.

And her life radiates grace. I mean, being around her, listening to her, I got to be in a room with just about 10 people. She was taping not television, radio show with Heath Lambert and the guy that had invited us was able to get us in, Jess and I, our former associate pastor, and I sat there and listened to her, and it's just hard to listen to her without just crying. I mean, I try to keep myself together, but I'm just like, what? There's just so much grace in her life. I feel envious of how much she knows the Lord.

That is the power of God and when you have an eternal perspective and you see what really matters, what matters but Jesus? Nothing matters. And a person with disabilities, one of the reasons God gives disabilities to us is to remind us of our brokenness, but also to let us see the wonder of his grace in ways that we don't. And listen, that's why God gives each one of us, every single, set aside disabilities, every single one of us, the challenges that you and I have, when we encounter them we're not supposed to be undone by them. I mean, you have a brother or sister who comes to you with a sin they're struggling with and you're surprised, you had no idea. You don't need to react like, you know, "Oh, this is tragic! You must be devastated!" No, this is a normal part of life in an abnormal world. This is something that Jesus is sufficient for. This is what I expect and I know someone who can help us.

So the creation of every person in the unique creation of every single person, the sovereign creation of every single person, that's the third point. The fourth point is the profound neediness of every person. The profound neediness of every person because our disabilities that God has granted us in the world and the body of Christ are pictures and windows into our brokenness. I mentioned earlier that passage in Romans 8:20, subjected to futility. You see this as you read the gospels carefully, one of the reasons that Jesus came healing like he did was not because he wanted the church to have an eternal healing ministry for the rest of time, God can heal anyone he wants to and we should pray for healing, I'm not saying that, he could do whatever he wants to do but the point of what Jesus was doing when he healed people was to show that he had come to deliver us from our sins and the effects of sin.

You see this in ways like remember when he heals the paralytic an early, early miracle in Matthew and Mark. He heals the man that was lowered through the roof, and he says this, "Your sins are forgiven you." And the Pharisees get all up in arms, "Why is he... Only God forgives sins." And Jesus says, "Which is easier to say, your sins are forgiven or take up your pallet and walk? Basically it's the same but that you should know that the Son of man can forgive sins." He's saying something here, he's saying, "Listen, these disabilities are a result of sin, and I've come to deal with sin and that's what you all need."

It's even clearer, I encourage you to read John 8 and John 9 this week. The evangelist in John 8 and 9, he quotes Jesus as saying, "I am the light of the world. He who believes in

Me shall not walk in darkness but shall have the light of life." And in the next chapter he heals a man born blind and in the dialogue with the Pharisees, he tells them, "The reality is you are all spiritually blind from birth." You see, he used the miracle and the very real physical disability to point out the fundamental, much more impactful spiritual disability. The problem is that you and I were born into this world, blind spiritually. We need Jesus Christ to open our eyes. And every single lost person needs Jesus Christ to open his eyes.

So every single person needs the gospel, and that's something that we need to remember, and God has given us the blessing of disabilities even to be a reminder of that. And then the fifth point, the future glory of every person in Christ. One of the things that I think that our suffering, this is true of our aging, but it's certainly true of profound disabilities, when you encounter someone who's profoundly disabled and you've girded your mind for action, and you see a human being there who may or may not be able to speak to me but I'm going to make good eye contact with them. I'm going to speak to them in a normal tone of voice. I'm going to welcome them. I'm not just going to welcome them, I'm going to welcome their whole family. And I'm going to talk with them and tell him how glad I am that they're here. I'm going to ask a question and see if they can answer it. And I'm going to be patient and not anxious and all bent out of shape if they don't. And I'm going to show them love and value. And then as we get to know one another over time, one of the things that we can be reminded of continually is, you know, and this is the way we should think about this, when you encounter someone who's profoundly disabled but they know the Lord Jesus Christ, "You know you will not always be like this. This is a short window of time."

The Bible uses language that is so amazing. Romans 8:28-30, I mentioned earlier, Paul says that familiar verse, "God causes all things to work together for good to those who love Him and are called according to His purpose. For those whom He foreknew, He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son, those whom He predestined He also called, those whom He called, He also justified, those whom He justified, He also glorified." It's five stages of this plan of salvation listed there. God foreknows, he predestines, he calls, he justifies, he glorifies. And if you started in that train, you're going to make it all the way to the end. The same group he foreknew is the same group that he predestines, is the same group that he called, is the same group that he justified, is the same group he will glorify.

And to be glorified means to have a glorified body, to not just have a body that works okay. You know, have you ever as I get older now in my late 50s, I think, man, it sure was great being in my 40s. Wow. Just to be 45 again. That would be awesome. But when I was 45, I wanted to be 30, right? But at our very best we are nothing compared to what we're going to be because when Jesus appears, we will be like him. We will be perfect humanity in glory so much that the only way God can describe it is that we will be glorified. Our full dignity and beauty will be there because, you know, it's a creative beauty. It's a reflecting beauty of God's true glory. He's the author of everything. Christ gets the praise for everything but, "Those who honor Me, I will honor." He honors us and glorifies us.

To think about that with a person with profound disabilities that, "You will not always be like this, and I will not always be like this. We're going to be glorified." Think about that if you could see what we're going to be like it swallows up everything, every concern and every care in this life. Those are things that if we will think on those things and meditate on those things and act on those things, we'll make our hearts more welcoming to every other person, those who are beset with physical or intellectual disabilities, or those who are beset with all, as every person is, with the spiritual profound disabilities of sin.

Let's go to the Lord in prayer.

Our Father, we thank You for Your word. We thank You that it is that which gives us the message of Jesus Christ, the message of salvation, that by His death He has taken our sins out of the way, and by His resurrection He has given us His righteousness, and He now reigns and rules and He will bring all of His enemies under, You will bring all of His enemies under His feet and He will reign forever and ever, and those who belong to Jesus will reign with Him. And whatever You ordain in this life is going to be used to redound to greater glory in the next, for the sufferings of this present age are not worthy to be compared to the glory that shall be revealed in us. Lord, give us eyes to see more and more and more according to Your word, to see others through the lens of Scripture not through the lens of this world and may Jesus be praised. We pray in His name. Amen.