

What Is God Doing through Disability?

A CoRE Conference Workshop

When unanticipated suffering enters our personal world it's not unusual for our knee-jerk reaction to be one of wanting to identify the cause. We want to know why. When the mystery hits close to home the search for answers about disease, disorder, and disability can become more intense. The realization that your loved one or you yourself may have to live out your remaining days on earth with a malady for which there is no cure may lead to more provocative questions, like: Who is being punished by the Almighty? Is God good? When disability hits home, our tendency as humans is to be driven by emotional reactions, rather than by truth. That is, we tend to let our emotions drive the car instead of our will governed by biblical truth. That's why we need a theological guide, or framework of thinking, that is built upon the Scriptures alone.

I. A Trifold Framework for Thinking about the Works of God

“For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever. Amen” (Romans 11:36).

A. All things are from God.

B. All things live through God.

C. All things are to God—that is, to the praise of his glory.

II. Two Common Temptations when Disability Hits Home

A. The Temptation to Blame Someone

B. The Temptation to Remake God in Our Image

III. The Foundation of God's Providence (*all things are from God*)

Definition: By providence we mean God employs his sovereign power and wisdom to continuously preserve every part of his creation and guide it toward his intended purpose.

Psalm 115:3 *Our God is in the heavens; he does all that he pleases.*

Psalm 119:68 *You are good and do good; teach me your statutes.*

Job 31:4 *Does not he see my ways and number all my steps?*

God Is Our Primary Caregiver.

Secondary causes of disability are endless: genetic abnormalities, disease, work-related accidents, birth defects, war and civil violence, athletic injuries, drunk drivers who run through red lights, failed suicide attempts, abuse . . . the list goes on. But the primary cause is singular: God. The good, wise, kind, sovereign Creator and Sustainer of all never ceases to watch over his creation for his glory and our good.

- If disability results from individual choices, we can rest in knowing that “The heart of man plans his way, but the Lord establishes his steps” (Proverbs 16:9).
- If disability results from the harmful actions of others, we can rest in knowing that what man means for evil, God can certainly work for good (Genesis 50:20; Romans 8:28).
- If suffering has no reasonable explanation, we can rest in knowing that God is good, wise, and kind—and he does all things according to his purpose (Ephesians 1:11). The mercy and nearness of our sovereign God bring much comfort to us. He is our primary caregiver.

IV. Four Pillars of Biblical Reasoning (*all things live through God*)

- A. Every human being is created in God's image and for His purpose and is, therefore, of immeasurable value.

Psalm 139:13-17

Exodus 4:11 Then the LORD said to him, “Who has made man's mouth? Who makes him mute, or deaf, or seeing, or blind? Is it not I, the LORD?”

B. Gospel treasure is hidden in earthen vessels but made more visible through suffering.

2 Corinthians 4:7-11

C. Human weakness is a platform for God's sufficient grace and power to be displayed in loving community.

2 Corinthians 12:1-10

D. Earthly suffering is temporary and designed to shift our hope to resurrection glory.

Philippians 3:8-10

2 Corinthians 4:16-17

V. God's Greater Purpose in All Things (*all things are to God*)

Ephesians 1:6, 12, 14

Ephesians 2:7

When we see those with disability through the eyes of Christ...

- We embrace human weakness as one means of making the strength of the Savior more glorious.
- We see disability as a means whereby self may be further dethroned, not only in our individual hearts, but in our local churches, as we practice the Savior's selfless love within the community of grace.
- We see disability ministry, not as a separate ministry of the church in its own separate building, but as the normal working out of biblical love as a localized family of God.
- We truly believe that the weak members of the body are just as important as the strong—they are *indispensable* to the proper functioning of the church.

In Christ, there is no distinction. In Christ, “abled” and “disabled” sinners stand side-by-side as co-heirs with Christ, seated in the heavenly places with Him (Ephesians 2:6). This realization promotes selfless love, which gives birth to compassion for the sake of the gospel.

NOTE: I draw this material from the book, [When Disability Hits Home](#), by Paul Tautges and Joni Eareckson Tada.

Other Recommended Resources

- [The Family Disability Toolkit](#) (Joni & Friends). This includes six of the following books (one book and five mini books).
- Baker, Ernie. [Help! Disability Pressures Our Marriage.](#)
- Deuel, Dave & Nancy. [Help! My Child Has a Disability.](#)
- Deuel, Dave. [Help! My Friend Has a Disability](#)
- Deuel, Dave. [Help! My Grandchild Has a Disability.](#)
- Deuel, Dave. [Help! My Sibling Has a Disability.](#)
- Lucas, Greg. [Wrestling with an Angel: A Story of Love, Disability, and the Lessons of Grace.](#)
- Tautges, Paul. [Anxiety: Knowing God's Peace.](#) 31-Day Devotional.

Tautges, Paul with Joni Eareckson Tada. [When Disability Hits Home: How God Magnifies His Grace in Our Weakness and Suffering.](#)