

PREPARE THE BRIDE

Nancy Rayan

Dedicated to
THE GLOBAL CHURCH

CONTENTS	PAGE NO.
1 - FROM MY HEART	1
2 - MY ATTITUDE	2
3 - CHRIST'S ATTITUDE	4
4 - PROVISION IN GOD'S LAWS	6
5 - GOD'S WAY OF REHABILITATION	8
6 - FRIENDSHIP	10
7 - FELLOWSHIP	11
8 - COMPLETE RESTORATION	12
9 - INVITATION	14
10 - INTEGRATION	15
11 - HEALING	17
12 - LET US PREPARE THE BRIDE	19

© Nancy Rayan - 1991
First Indian edition published by Nancy Rayan, June 1991.
8/248, Sahakar Nagar - 3, Chembur, Bombay 400 071

This revised edition published with permission July 2000 by:
Crossroads Christian Fellowship with Disabled Persons in NSW Inc.
Suite 2, 265-271 Pennant Hills Road, Thornleigh 2120 Australia

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced
in any form without the written permission of the publisher.

All references are from the Amplified Version unless otherwise notified.

1 - FROM MY HEART

Clutching his ragged clothes around him, Murugappa, a stocky young Indian, traced his steps slowly and steadily through the corridor to the main entrance of the church.

It was a huge church in Madras, a busy, dusty city, of 5 million people, in South India. On that day especially, the pews were full to overflowing with people in their best clothes; the fragrance from the flowers adorning the heads of the womenfolk filled the air.

It was Christmas day!

The sound of bells ringing in the church rent the air, adding to the aura of reverent celebration.

The congregation stood up and sang, "O come, all ye faithful." Everyone was immersed in the song and its rhythm, while Murugappa made his way falteringly through the thronging celebrants.

He smelt the sweet aroma in the air. Eager to be part of the pleasant atmosphere, he took another step to move in, smiling, when suddenly a rough hand gripped him and dragged him out.

"I.....I have not come to beg," he said falteringly. "I want to worship the Lord."

But, before long he was thrust out and among his crowd again outside the gate!

Remorse and shame filled his heart and choked his voice. He sat down slowly cupping his head in his hands.

"Why, oh Lord, why am I blind?" he fumed within.

"Isn't it just because I am blind, that I wasn't allowed to stay in?"

"Is receiving a dropped coin and sometimes a few rupees in festive season enough to quench my spiritual thirst?"

"Don't I also have a soul?"

He began to give vent to his feelings.

This is the heart cry of many people with visual impairments.

There are 10 million people with visual impairments in India; about 40 million of them in the world. There are over 450 million people with disabilities in the world; 80% of them are in the developing countries!

The plight of many people with disabilities is no different from that of Murugappa.

In a country predominated by superstition, idol worship, animism, and ignorance, there is no room for people with disabilities.

The reactions of people, however, vary from community to community, depending on its traditions, culture and belief. Certain communities used to kill a disabled child; for example a community depending upon skills of war for its survival could not afford a place to its members with disabilities. As such communities progressed from a warfare state to a welfare state, so did the changes in people's outlooks. The people with disabilities became members of a society where they needed to be looked after, but never on equal terms with others. In life's everyday situations, they were denied opportunities; their expectations were restricted. Thus we have 'socialised' the impairment into disability and turned it into a handicap.

Disability is viewed as a curse, particularly in the developing countries. It carries with it a stigma that affects the person with a disability.

Disability, no doubt, is a global problem, but the ability of God far exceeds human disability. It is the world which exaggerates disability beyond its measure, but God in His sovereignty embraces disabled people in His will and plan.

In practice, the church, which is the Body of Christ -whatever its traditions - accommodates people with disabilities only to a very limited extent. The churches have done considerable work in building special institutions, thereby segregating people with disabilities from society and the church. They have not been integrated either into society or into the church.

Many a time we soothe our conscience regarding people with disabilities by doling out charity, thereby deriving momentary satisfaction. If we ponder over our acts, we would be surprised to know that the recipients of such charity were untouched by our acts. We treat people with disabilities as liabilities and objects of charity rather than with real love and compassion.

Our acts of love can be stepping stones towards accepting their disability, which in turn can be stamped out by God's ability !

As you turn over every page of this book you will discover for yourself the reality of God's ability in overcoming man's disability.

2 - *MY ATTITUDE*

"Poor man!"

"How I feel sorry for him!"

"Thank God for my health."

"Praise God ! I am not like that!"

These are some of our reactions on seeing people with disabilities. Many a time we also make the mistake of treating them as though they are totally deprived of all their senses.

"You have sinned, either in this life or the previous one" is the Karma philosophy.

"It is just your fate" - that is the Fatalistic philosophy.

Whatever philosophy we may adhere to, the point is very clear that our attitudes need to be changed. Why accuse the people of this century of their inability to cope with the present challenges of people with disabilities? Such attitudes have existed for ages. Take, for example, the disciples of our Lord Jesus Christ. When they saw a man blind from his birth, they asked the Lord Jesus: "Lord, why is this man blind? Is it due to his sin or his parent's sin?"

The question which the disciples put to their Master was uncharitably judgmental. They took it for granted that this extraordinary calamity was the punishment for some uncommon wickedness. The greatest sufferers are not however to be looked upon as the greatest sinners.

They were unnecessarily curious in asking who was guilty, this man or his parents? We are more inquisitive about other people's defects than about our own. The justice of God's

dispensation is always certain, but not always to be accounted for, for his judgements are deep.

If the disciples of Jesus Christ, whom He chose and led, could ask this question, is it any wonder then that the people of this century ask the same question? Yet it is surprising to know that in a changing world, we have a question, unchanged by modernism, religions and education.

Perhaps you, too, ask the same question - may be not by verbalizing it, but by your unwillingness to take action, you are putting a rubber stamp to the question.

It is interesting to note the answer Jesus gave the disciples. "Neither this man, nor his parents sinned, but this happened so that the work of God might be displayed in his life."

John 9:3 (NIV)

Christ told them two things concerning such uncommon calamities: firstly, that they are not always inflicted as punishments of sin. (Many who are less sinful than others are made much more miserable in this life.) Secondly, misfortunes are sometimes intended purely for the glory of God and the manifesting of his works. If God be glorified either by us or in us, we were not made in vain.

This man was born blind so that the works of God might be manifest in him. Firstly, that God's extraordinary power and goodness might be manifested in curing him. Secondly, that our Lord Jesus might prove Himself sent of God to be the true light of the world.

Whereas the disciples were condemning in their concern about the cause of the disability, Jesus showed compassion for the person himself, in overcoming his disability and improving his quality of life.

How soothing are the words of Jesus compared with the words of his disciples. We are swift to condemning the person concerned rather than consoling his suffering heart. May we have God's wisdom to identify with the physically impaired!

3 - CHRIST'S ATTITUDE

One thing is sure that our emotions are disturbed when we see people with disabilities. As a result, we give in to pity and sympathy.

Let me ask, "What good is your pity and sympathy to the people with disabilities?" At the most you may be deprived of some coins or notes, which satisfies your emotion but has the least effect on the emotions of those receiving your charity.

Helen Keller aptly put it, "It is not my disability that is a problem, but the attitude of other people towards my disability, that is the problem."

What then, is the right attitude towards people with disabilities?

"Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus," writes Paul to the Philippians.

Philippians 2:5

An incident related in Matthew's gospel, chapter 20, illustrates Christ's attitude. Two blind men called out to Jesus as He was passing by them on the roadside. In spite of the demands of the crowd following Him, Jesus stopped and called them.

The cries of two blind men stopped the Son of God. Was their cry so powerful?

No, Jesus' heart was tender towards personal needs amid the throng. He had compassion on them - a kind of compassion which led him to take action and not remain passive about it.

Jesus' compassion for the blind men led Him to ask them, "What do you want me to do for you?"

Matthew 20:32

Sam, an elderly man was standing on the pavement near the zebra crossing, waiting to cross one of the busy main roads of Bombay. As the lights turned from amber to green, a hand clutched his arm and dragged him cross to the other side of the road. The man, a total stranger, heaved a sigh of satisfaction as he was happy to have helped a blind man.

However, his happiness was short-lived, as Sam, whom he had supposed to be blind removed his dark sun-glasses and thanked him for his intended kindness. Then he also suggested to the stranger that he should have enquired of him before offering help, for he was now going the wrong direction !

Being a sighted man, Sam could go back to the place he wanted. Imagine a blind man's plight!

We take for granted the kind of help to be rendered to people with disabilities.

What we need is acceptance of people with disabilities as independent thinking people. When we come to realise this, then we are on a proper footing from which to render appropriate help to people with disabilities.

Further on in Matthew's account, we read that Jesus touched their eyes. Do I touch a beggar on the street, while I am proceeding in a great hurry to conduct a crusade or to the office or school?

But My Lord did it!

He was not ashamed to touch a blind person, The word 'touch' reminds me of another incident.

"How are you, brother?" asked Sunny, a robust young man putting his arm around Mayandi, a young man with a visual disability, who was attending the Confirmation classes in the Tamil Methodist Church at Bombay.

Mayandi stood stock still, while Sunny went on chattering jovially until he suddenly sensed something was wrong. He looked at Mayandi. Tears were flowing from his eyes.

"Brother! what happened?" questioned Sunny rather bewildered. Mayandi opened his mouth and said with lips quivering, "Brother I have lived 35 years now, but until today no one has put his arm around me. You are the first one to do that," went on Mayandi now with a smile on his tear-stained face.

The touch of a person's hand touches the heart of a blind man, because of the identification with him and his disability. Do you realise that your touch of personal identification can transform the person with a disability?

Let's go back to a similar incident in the Bible, where Mark, writes that the disciples rebuked the blind man begging for mercy, as though he had no right to call upon the Lord! Or could it have been that it presented an hindrance to their mission?

Do you have time? "Oh, No ! Don't talk about time !"

Although a precious gift from God, time is often selfishly preserved by His children.

But Jesus had time for this blind man. The Bible records that Jesus stood still.

Is it easy to stand still in a busy world?

If you stop, a million behind you in their hurry are going to jostle over you. But Jesus spared His time. Couldn't we?

Also, Jesus could have gone to the blind man, but He did not go Himself. Instead, perhaps to bring about a transformation among the disciples. He sent them to bring him.

Those who rebuked the blind man, now say "cheer up, Master is calling". Those who discouraged him at first, are now the persons who convey to him the gracious call of Christ. What a great transformation from an attitude of discouragement to an attitude of encouragement!

Don't be silent when you lead a person with a disability. Communicate with him. Most of all do not be embarrassed by his disability. Show an interest in him and his disability, in order to break the ice and win over his confidence.

In our experience with people with visual disabilities in India for the past ten years, we have not refrained from walking with them in 'difficult' areas such as jungles and crowded streets, in order to show we considered that they were equally able to appreciate their surroundings.

Allowing God's love, compassion, acceptance, identification and equality with others, to work in you, will give you the grace to help people with disabilities and lead them to the Lord.

4 - *PROVISION IN GOD'S LAWS*

"Don't guide a blind man when you see him, lest he comes back again to disturb you," goes a saying among the hill people of the Himalayas.

Can you imagine the situation of a person misled in a hilly region?

How different God is, for while giving the laws to the Israelites, God ensured that people with disabilities were not overlooked.

"Cursed be he, who misleads a blind man from his way. All the people shall say 'Amen!'"

Deuteronomy 27:18

What is HIS WAY? Jesus said: "I am the Way and the Truth and the Life; no man comes to the Father except through Me."

John 14:8 (NIV)

So it is our duty to show the blind person the Way, that is Jesus Christ Himself.

If we do not show blind people the Way, then they may go the wrong way and we will be held responsible for misleading them.

By misleading blind people one becomes subject to the curse.

Let us, therefore, ensure we lead them to Jesus Christ, for His death opened the Way to the Father for them, too!

"There is a destitute blind and deaf girl in a village in South India. I must go and bring her to my school" interrupted Mrs. Esther Cornelius, looking up from a letter just handed to her.

"Please let us finish the Board meeting" pleaded the anxious Chairman, looking at other members.

"Does she even know the address of the girl?" questioned the Secretary with a frown on his face.

"I can find my way from what my friends told me," replied Esther arranging the contents of her bag in readiness to leave.

This was at a Board meeting of the Lutheran School for the Blind. Esther had always been a pillar of the school she founded. Her devotion to work knew no bounds. No one could divert her attention from pursuing her goals.

"I feel the urge in me to go out and search for the girl and you may please continue with the meeting" concluded Esther who was gone like a whirlwind.

The place was about 40 kms away. The only means of transport to the village was a bus, even the arrival of which was unpredictable. But Esther went on with a word of prayer and, on reaching the village, enquired now and then from passers by about the disabled girl.

It was dusk. Some of the villagers were returning home from their farms, others were leading home their cattle. Families were gathering in their small thatched houses, lit by tiny lanterns. But Mary lay outside her small hut desolate and lonely.

Esther could not believe her eyes. Was this the child, or just a bundle of clothes around a skeleton?

Esther's heart went further than the picture before her eyes. She saw beyond a bundle of bones draped with rags to a child created by God, with the potential of a precious life to be fulfilled by the right care and attention. Esther had the compassion, the means and the experience to offer that care and attention.

Being a stranger in the village was no deterrant to Esther in pursuing the matter further, and her search for the relatives of the child, whom she would call Mary, took her to her grandmother's home.

After a long chat, Esther was able to convince Mary's grandmother about the importance of Mary's education and rehabilitation, so that Mary could learn to live a meaningful, independent life. Thus Mary came under the custody of Esther, with whose continuous care, love, affection and devotion, Mary began to respond and learn.

Today Mary is an independent girl learning to cook, to use the typewriter and to take care of herself. What is more! Morning and evening she brings the Bible and kneels along with Esther folding her hands reverently. Her unspoken prayers are acknowledged by the unseen God.

Esther was fulfilling God's laws given to the Israelites:

"You shall not curse the deaf, or put a stumbling block before the blind, but you shall reverently fear your God. I am the Lord."

Leviticus 19:14

We must be sensitive to the safety of blind people and not put a stumbling block before them. I don't think anyone is so barbarous as to put a stumbling block before blind people, but if you are not a stepping stone for helping disabled people to go to the Church, then you are like a stumbling block.

You may not curse deaf people, but if you don't communicate the Gospel to them, they will be misled and lost for eternity. Surely, if you know the Truth and keep it from people, then you are as good as cursing them.

God did not just stop there by giving Laws, but He also assured the remnant of His people, Israel in Babylon, the land of their captivity that He would restore them back to Jerusalem. Even in the restoration of the remnant people of Israel, God ensured that all the people with disabilities were also brought back.

"Behold, I will bring them from the North country, and gather them from the uttermost parts of the earth and among them the blind and the lame, the woman with child and her who labours in childbirth together; a great company they shall return here to

Jerusalem. They shall come with weeping and pouring out prayers; I will lead them back; I will cause them to walk by streams of water, and bring them in a straight way in which they shall not stumble; for I am a Father to Israel."

Jeremiah 31 :8,9

God assured the people of Israel that He would again take them into a covenant relationship with Himself, so that they would know His abundance in resettling happily in their own land and have a joyful return out of their captivity.

Though many of them were very unfit for travel, yet that was not to be a hindrance to them. God did not want their blindness and lameness to be an excuse for them to stay behind; neither was it to be an excuse for their companions to leave them behind, for they ought to have been ready to help the blind and the lame.

The reason why God wanted all of them to be restored is that He was their Father. He is the Father of all people with disabilities and as a loving Father, He does not want anyone to perish, but longs to release everyone from the clutches of Satan.

Their disability should not be an excuse for not integrating them into the Church. Their disability was not a stumbling block for God, but it became a platform to display His overriding ability in their human disability. Just as God did not leave them behind as liabilities during the restoration of the remnant of Israel to Jerusalem, so also you and I should not leave them behind on our heavenly journey to the New Jerusalem.

5 - *GOD'S WAY OF REHABILITATION*

Kumar opened his eyes and wondered how he ever landed in a hospital ward! Quickly, he looked at himself -his legs were bandaged and his whole body was in pain.

Faintly, he remembered the scene a couple of weeks ago, when he was run over by a truck. "I wish my legs are not injured badly," he hoped, hardly realizing that both his legs were amputated below his knees.

Just then, he saw his wife walking towards him. How he was happy to see her after a long time! He thought of his wife's tender loving care, which, he supposed, would not only soothe his body, but also his mind.

However, she stood there like a statue, unmoved by his condition. Then, with anger shooting from her eyes, she said, "We don't want a cripple in the house. Stay away from us."

He couldn't believe his ears. Was that his wife? How could she speak that way? Crippled?

The reality of the truth dawned on him for the first time. Hopelessness and helplessness gripped him.

"No one to own me, now? Not even my wife and son?" cried his wounded heart and the sound echoed in the hospital ward.

I was shocked to hear this story. It aroused many questions in my mind. As I pondered over it a new truth dawned on me.

Yes, it is possible not only in India but also anywhere, that many people do not like to own a disabled child or person.

In a conversation between Moses and Jehovah, we see two of the most important aspects of rehabilitation.

1. Ownership: "And Moses said to the Lord, 'O Lord I am not eloquent or a man of words, neither before nor since you have spoken to your servant, for I am slow of speech, and have a heavy and awkward tongue."

"And the Lord said to him, Who has made man's mouth? Or who makes the dumb, or deaf or the seeing, or the blind? Is it not I, the Lord?"

Exodus 4:10-12

Moses is seen complaining about his disability - "not eloquent; slow of speech; having a heavy and awkward tongue." What a terrible handicap for a leader!

Here is one of God's masterpieces of creation refusing to accept his own identity, considering only his awkward impediment. The world also looks at defects and amplifies them. No doubt the masterpiece has imperfections.

Strangely enough, God OWNS the imperfect masterpiece. Have you ever heard of a defective work of art displayed in public? Have you ever heard of an artist boasting of his spoilt picture? But our God does just that!

OWNS is such a small word, but it can do great wonders! What a privilege we have to be owned as God's children!

For the world, death is a defeat, but, in God's hands, it is a victory. Similarly disability is imperfection in the world, but it is a masterpiece in God's hands.

Here is a great challenge to us. Just as God owned Moses, a man with a disability, for a chosen purpose, we should own people with disabilities for their positive potential in life.

2. Acceptance: Jehovah's conversation with Moses continues now with a different emphasis. "Now therefore go, and I will be with your mouth, and will teach you what you shall say."

Exodus 4:12

In spite of all the excuses and arguments, God wants Moses to go - to accept his disability and to go in HIS strength. That is why we see Him assuring Moses of His presence and power.

Acceptance of his own disability is difficult, especially for a person who becomes disabled in late childhood or as an adult.

It is essential that we encourage people with disabilities to accept their disability, as this is the first step along the path to total rehabilitation.

"If there is a perfect God, then why am I blind?"

"Why did your loving God make me disabled?"

These are some of the questions people with disabilities ask us. If we analyse these questions, we see that they reflect a lack of acceptance.

You may now ask how to encourage people with disabilities to accept their disability?

1. Show them examples of people with disabilities living normal lives.
2. Develop in them an awareness of responsibility for themselves, their family and society.
3. Show them positive ways of approaching life.
4. Above all, let them experience your touch of acceptance with love and concern, which can revolutionize their self-esteem.

6 - FRIENDSHIP

"Oh no!" cried the disappointed invalid. It was a mere couple of steps between him and his healing.

"Once again I have lost an opportunity," he wept helplessly as for the umpteenth time someone else had got ahead of him into the pool.

"How long, oh, how long?" he fumed within and slowly dragged himself back to his bed.

He looked at himself and his mind went back to the day he had arrived there. He had come to the pool thinking that he would be healed within a day or two and then in anticipation he couldn't contain his joy. But now 38 years had passed and he was still lying there, helpless without anyone to assist him to get into the pool.

How many had gone into the pool and been healed! But here he had laid for all these years, not for the lack of opportunity, but for lack of assistance. "How long will it be?" questioned his hopeless heart.

It was at this time that Jesus Christ entered Jerusalem and passed by the pool of Bethesda, near the Sheep Gate. Within its porches lay a great multitude of people with various diseases, awaiting the arrival of the angel, who stirred up the waters. The first person who went into the pool after the angel stirred the waters would be cured of whatever disease he had.

Perhaps a special mention of the blind, the lame and the paralysed is made in this story, told in John's Gospel, chapter 5, because they lay longest waiting in the porches as a result of their special inability to get themselves into the water.

Though there were such a crowd of sick and diseased people, yet Jesus fixed his eyes upon this man alone. The invalid had often been deprived of a cure, so Jesus took him for His patient.

The poor, powerless man takes this opportunity to set out the misery of his case. He complains of a lack of friends to help him into the pool. "I have no one, NO FRIEND to do that much for me, not even those who were healed here."

It is hard to single out the most needy person in this world. However, God wants you to befriend those close at hand who are lonely and helpless. If we are close to Him, then He will guide us to the right person at the right time.

Rungta, a shy young man, crippled in both his legs was happy to see Rev. John Simeon of the Baptist Church, Calcutta in his hut. The pastor chose this day for his visit as it was Rungta's birthday. The conversation between them was strained and without much participation from Rungta.

However, as Rungta wanted to give him a cup of tea as a token of his appreciation for the pastor's visit, he went to light the kerosene stove. Unfortunately, the stove would not light as the burner has not been cleaned for ages. Rungta went on pumping the stove in vain. John looked on for a moment and then knelt beside Rungta and asked, "May I help you?"

Rungta lifted up his face. The smile on it conveyed that he wanted help. So the pastor took a dirty rag and cleaned the burner and began to light the stove, which now burnt very well. This incident broke the ice between them and today, they are the thickest of pals.

Try becoming friends with people with disabilities, you'll enjoy every bit of their friendship.

7 - FELLOWSHIP

Gul Mohammed of India is listed in the Guinness Book of Records as the shortest man in the world. His extraordinarily small stature is a severe handicap to him.

"It is a curse," he says and stresses that insensitive humans have given him psychological scars and wounds more unbearable than any bodily deformity.

As I was thinking about short people, I was reminded of the chorus which I learnt in Sunday school.

*Zacchaeus was a wee little man
And a wee little man was he.
He climbed up on a sycamore tree
For the Lord he wanted to see,
And when the Saviour passed that way
He looked up to the tree and said,
"Zacchaeus, you come down
For I am coming to your house for tea."*

His short stature separated him from the vast sea of humanity around Jesus. He acquired wealth by unpopular means, which would have only served to intensify any inferiority he already felt. However, although he was small, he had a big heart - a heart to see Jesus.

Zacchaeus' desire was not only emotional but also practical, as he demonstrated by climbing up into a tree.

This gave Zacchaeus an opportunity to see Jesus from a vantage point which others did not have. This satisfied Zacchaeus. It also satisfied Jesus' desire to save the Lost.

As his name suggests, "Jehovah remembered," Jesus stopped near the tree to look at the man who so strongly desired to see Him and said, "Zacchaeus, I must stay at your house today."

Zacchaeus' joy knew no bounds and he received Jesus in his home joyfully and set things right before the Lord, which made Zacchaeus' life more meaningful and enjoyable not only for himself, but also for others.

What a change in Zacchaeus' life after meeting Jesus! Once he had been rejected, now he was accepted !

Just as Jesus waited near the sycamore tree to speak to Zacchaeus and give him fellowship, we need to stop, to speak to the people with disabilities and extend our arms of friendship to them.

While Zacchaeus was rejoicing, there were some people in the crowd, who muttered against Jesus, "He has gone to be the guest of a sinner."

If Christ has stooped so low, we too should definitely do so. Nothing can be too low - for those of us already touched by Christ descending from His throne in heaven!

Extraordinarily short people? We see them in circus!

Is that their place? The children of darkness are more wiser than the children of Light, for they are used by the world and are not in the Church!

Zacchaeus may have been short, but what he lacked was Fellowship, which is the richness our Lord Jesus gave him. His disability was transformed by Christ's empowering ability.

8 - COMPLETE RESTORATION

It was a bright winter morning. The king was seated on his throne with his courtiers around him His heart was filled with praise for his Lord. So he took up his lyre and sang:

"Bless the Lord, O my soul!

And all that is within me

Bless His Holy Name!

Bless the Lord, O my soul!

And forget not all His benefits."

King David put down his lyre with a frown on his face and asked: "Is there anyone still left of the house of Saul to whom I can show kindness for Jonathan's sake?"

Seraiah, his secretary brought in Ziba, a servant of Saul's household.

Once again David repeated his question to Ziba: "Is there no one still left of the house of Saul to whom I can show God's kindness?"

"There is still a son of Jonathan," answered Ziba.

"Son of Jonathan, my friend, whom I loved dearly!" exclaimed David.

"But he is crippled in both feet," continued Ziba reluctantly.

"It is sufficient that he is Jonathan's son. Bring him" ordered the King.

The world looked at Mephibosheth as a useless, good-for-nothing man. Being lame, he couldn't go out and be a warrior as befits a prince. Neither could he go back to the fields to till for his own household.

But to King David all the disadvantages of being lame appeared insignificant compared with the fact that Mephibosheth was the son of Jonathan. David looked on him as Jonathan's son and not as a lame man.

Even today, whenever we see people with disabilities, we judge them on their outward appearance. God, however, sees people with disabilities as His creation - even as His 'sons'!

Meanwhile, far away in Lo-Debar in Gilead, Mephibosheth, the son of Jonathan lived in obscurity, often reminiscing the glorious, deeds of his father and grandfather.

"I don't know how to thank you, Machir, for your generosity," he would often utter while considering his lameness and forgotten status.

Machir appears to have been a generous man, who had accommodated Mephibosheth, not out of any disaffection for David or his government, but out of compassion for the disinherited son of a prince. Later on we find him kind to David, too, when the king fled from Absalom.

That day when Mephibosheth heard the knock at his door, as usual he expected his breakfast at the kindness of Machir. But when the door opened, he exclaimed: "Ziba! You are here!"

"Get ready. The king is calling you," urged Ziba.

Mephibosheth trembled to hear the news. "Oh! Why should the king want to see a lame dog like me?" he questioned in anxiety looking at his useless legs. "No one has ever called to see me, so far," he began to think. "I have been a burden even to Machir."

"Hurry up!" pleaded Ziba, as he helped him to dress. Mephibosheth left for the palace with fear and trembling, for he had never seen the king before. He only knew that David had been made king after his grandfather, but he had also heard of the goodness of this present king.

As they were travelling, he faintly remembered his nurse telling him stories about his father and the king himself. "Could it be true?" he wondered.

"Ziba!" called Mephibosheth, "Why do you think the king wants to see me?" he questioned.

"I don't know, Mephibosheth," replied Ziba.

"At least I can see the beautiful palace and the King."

"What a magnificent place!" exclaimed Mephibosheth as he entered the palace. When he came to David, he bowed down to pay him respect.

"Mephibosheth!" David called. Mephibosheth looked up and replied "Your servant."

Their gaze was locked for a moment. David was reminded of Jonathan and their covenant.

"Don't be afraid," David said to him, "for I will surely show you kindness for the sake of Jonathan, your father. I will restore to you all the land that belonged to Saul, your grandfather, and you will always eat at my table."

The Bible records, "And Mephibosheth lived in Jerusalem, because he always ate at the King's table, and he was crippled in both his feet."

2 Samuel 9:13 (NIV)

Mephibosheth represents the helplessness and loneliness of people with disabilities in the world. There are millions of people with disabilities in the villages and remote areas of the Third World countries, who need to be reached and restored with the hope of the Gospel and the knowledge of the abiding presence of the Lord Jesus Christ.

David, reflecting Jesus Christ, did three things to Mephibosheth.

1. Restoration of Self-esteem: All this time Mephibosheth had experienced an attitude of rejection, but now King David shows him kindness, which is God's attitude, in remembrance of the covenant between him and Jonathan, to which God was a witness.
2. Restoration of his Identity: After having lived at the mercy of a generous man, Mephibosheth now has been restored to his rightful inheritance through the kindness of the king. Not only were his material possessions restored to him, but also his title! - Ziba was made his servant. He was restored to the status of a prince.

It may be easy for us to show kindness to people with disabilities. Restoring their identity however, may even cost us something, but could give them the confidence to live meaningful lives.
3. Restoration to society: He, who was rejected by his own grandfather's servant, has now the opportunity to be among the king's family.

From loneliness to royal society! From frugality to rich abundance!

It was not only the restoration to ordinary society, but also elevation to the king's table!

How often do we show kindness to people with disabilities and restore to them their identity? David went a step further to show the world Mephibosheth's rightful place.

Satan has too often deprived people with disabilities of their rightful inheritance in Jesus Christ and also their rightful place in the Church.

What a challenge for us to show the world that the rightful place for people with disabilities is in THE CHURCH ! - the 'Body of Christ'.

We rightly give them the Gospel, but we let them go away without being introduced to be accepted and respected in Church. "Church! why not?", you may wonder.

"How easily can a wheel chair enter your church?"

"Do you care enough to have an interpreter for a deaf person in the church?"

"Do you have volunteers to escort people with visual disabilities to the church and sit with them in the pew?"

What we see in King David's act is an example of complete restoration of a person with a disability to normal life.

9 - INVITATION

"We have a number of schools for children who are blind, deaf and with intellectual disabilities. We are doing our part. Isn't that more than enough?" argued a bishop.

IT IS NOT ENOUGH.....

.....Until we have come to the point of saturation in fulfilling God's commands regarding people with disabilities. The Lord has taught us a lesson in the parable of the Great Banquet in Luke 14:15-24.

A man once gave a great banquet. Many were invited. When the invited guests did not turn up, the master became angry and sent his servant to go out quickly into the streets and alleys of the town and bring in the poor, the crippled, the blind and the lame. There was a great sense of urgency because the banquet was already prepared.

The servant, fulfilling His master's command, went back to him and said, "There is still room."

So the master told the servant to go out into the highways and by-ways and compel the underprivileged people to come, for the banquet was ready.

People with disabilities become immune to the general negligence of the public and hence we need to compel them and convince them to come. "Who would prepare a banquet for us?", they would have questioned. Perhaps they were unaware of Jesus' teaching to invite the poor, the crippled, the lame and the blind, when a banquet was prepared.

It is not enough to bring in only the people with disabilities within our reach, we also need to go out to far off places especially because "there is yet room in God's House."

The 'Banquet' is ready and there is still room. So the Master wants His servants to compel the people to come, so that all over the world His House may be filled by including people with disabilities.

But, where are they in our churches today? Have they been invited?

"Am I invited?" questioned Geetha, a elderly lady with a visual disability, while her fingers ran through the braille invitation form in her hand. "Of course, you are," asserted Agnello, a volunteer at the Fellowship Centre for the people with disabilities in Gujarat, West India.

Fellowship Centre is a place, where people with disabilities irrespective of caste, religion and language are invited and are attended by sighted volunteers. Even though Gospel sermons are not preached here, but God's love is shown in action by listening to them, helping them by writing letters, reading letters, text books, magazines, newspapers etc. and even playing some games.

Hundreds have been led to the Lord through such centres. In fact, Fellowship Centre is a bridge to the church.

You may say, "There is no Fellowship Centre in my area."

Why not open your home and invite them, may be for a cup of tea?

Have you ever thought of inviting them for your House Group Bible Study or Cottage Prayer Meeting

May be you have invited and people don't turn up. Don't give up. Go after them. Persuade them. Your love will win them over.

Radha, a young college girl with a visual disability, never responded to my invitation to the Centre. I was troubled in my heart and asked the Lord to guide me. I invited her this time for my daughter's birthday. She came joyfully with a gift for my daughter.

She enjoyed the whole evening and before she left our home she said, "I didn't know you people are so warm and loving."

Ever since, she has been so regular at the Centre and recently even to the church.

What we desire is that the churches throughout the world will obey 'the Master's call' and make it as their mission.

10 - INTEGRATION

It too often looks as though the church is meant for able-bodied people only. That's probably why we see so few people with disabilities in our churches and para-church organisations.

One thing is certain that the church is meant to all. This is very clearly portrayed in Matthew 21:12-14

After the triumphal entry of Jesus into Jerusalem, he entered the temple, perhaps for the last time before His crucifixion. The Lord Jesus Christ was dismayed by what went on there - buying, selling and changing of money. It hurt Him to see the temple of God made into "a den of thieves."

The house of sacrifices was to be a house of prayer, for that was the substance and soul of all its services. Hence the necessity for Christ to cleanse the temple.

The abuse and perverted use of the temple up until then had kept the true worshippers out of it. For we read, "The blind and the lame came to Him at the temple, and He healed them."

Matthew 21:14 (NIV)

It is obvious that the people with disabilities entered the temple after the stumbling blocks were removed from it.

What we see in our churches today is a amplified picture of that temple! Even though the commercial concept may not be conspicuous, yet if people with disabilities are not found in the churches, then there is something wrong in our churches today. Probably the churches need to be cleansed.

The triumphal entry of Jesus into Jerusalem and the cleansing of the temple paved the way for the triumphal entry of people with disabilities into the Temple.

I remember Jadhav, a Hindu blind man who had accepted Jesus Christ in his heart, was so enthusiastic to attend the church and he was sent to one near his home. The next time we met him, he showed no enthusiasm to go to church.

On enquiring, we were shocked to know that he had sat through several services on the same day, yet no one had cared to speak to him. The only person that addressed him was the Sexton as he carefully sent him out before closing the door.

Is it any surprise, then, that Jadhav had lost his interest to visit a church again?

In our experience with the India Fellowship For The Visually Handicapped during the last decade, what we have seen is that there is no dearth of the preaching of the gospel to people with disabilities. The gospel is the same for everyone. However, the problem has been that of integrating disabled people into the churches. Sadly we have noticed an increase in the number of disabled people dropping out from our churches today. Very few have stayed, but only where the churches were receptive and were already prepared for the people with disabilities to be integrated.

It was an eye opener for us that the need was to challenge the churches to be prepared before people with disabilities could be introduced to them.

How do we prepare a church?

1. **Warm Welcome:** The first impression is the lasting impression in the hearts of the people with disabilities. So extend your hand of warm welcome a disabled person. Find a suitable seat for him/her, not necessarily near another person with a disability, but where he/she can comfortably enjoy the service, preferably alongside a church member who could offer sensitive guidance.
2. **Handle the person's disability with respect:** As you usher them into their seat, take care of the crutches, wheelchairs, or white canes. Allow them to keep their belongings with them if desired, lest they be worried about the same throughout the service. Do not give a person with a visual disability a printed song book which is meaningless to him. The person would very much appreciate regularly used church books being available in braille or large print, or, until the same are obtained, a person to quietly read the words to him. A deaf person would appreciate a volunteer communicating the sermon in sign language. Make sure the wheel chair enters your church without any problem.
3. **Acknowledge the person's Identity:** In many of the churches of course, newcomers are recognised by some means or other. In the same way, it is good to recognise new people with disabilities during the service, which will boost their morale.

4. Treat the person with equality: Rajalu, a young man with a visual disability came back to his hostel rather disappointed after his first Sunday in the church.

"Why are you quiet?" enquired Subash, his roommate. "Didn't you enjoy the service?"

"No, it's not that," Rajalu sulked and continued "but they never allowed me to put in my offering."

"Maybe they thought it was too much to expect to receive money from disabled person," concluded Subash, with a disappointed heart.

When the offering bag came to Rajalu's row, they had bypassed him, which hurt him. Perhaps they forgot that the Lord noticed the widow's mite rather than the wealth of the rich man.

As well as preparing church members, it is also helpful to prepare the people with disabilities by briefing them about the order and procedure of the service to avoid unnecessary embarrassment.

Above all, take utmost care to make them feel at home. Remember the words the Lord Himself used to describe the church : "My House." A house is meant for relaxation and personal attention. Let the Lord's House be used for this, especially in the context of ministering to disabled people.

11 - HEALING

The question of healing is an interesting topic in our seminars and workshops. There are some who believe all the people should be healed, while there are others who believe that the gift of healing has ceased to be applicable today. These are two extreme views, while yet others embrace the thought that God heals whom he chooses, according to His will and plan.

Healing was part of the ministry of the Biblical prophets, but we don't read that they healed every person with a disease or disability. Even though Jesus had an extensive healing ministry, yet He did not choose to come down from the Cross even when they mocked Him saying, "He saved others, but He can't save Himself. He is the king of Israel! Let Him come down now from the cross and we will believe in Him."

Matthew 27:42 (NIV)

In the garden of Gethsemane, He prayed thrice that the cup of suffering may be taken away from Him, but eventually yielded willingly to His Father's will and attained the Highest Glory through His obedience.

We read of the same unquestioning submission to the Father's will in Jesus' healing ministry. While there were many sick people in the five porches of Bethesda, yet God chose to heal only one man.

Even during the apostolic era, the apostles healed many people of different kinds of disabilities, but we also read of instances like Paul being afflicted by a 'thorn in the flesh.' One is tempted to ask why wasn't Paul healed, when he healed many and even raised dead people to life? It was also Paul who advised Timothy to take some wine for his infirmity. Paul believed the words of the Lord, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness."

2 Corinthians 12:9 (NIV)

The question still remains whether we should pray for miraculous healing or not?

There is nothing wrong in praying for healing as long as the recipients of prayer are not led into a false hope and left feeling more miserable than ever. Some believe that one is healed according to one's faith, because Jesus said "Your faith has made you well." ^{Matthew 9:22} Some others attribute healing to the power of the person who prays rather than God Himself. Despite the power of prayer or the faith in which it is done, it is God who chooses to heal or not, for God is Sovereign.

The fact is that miraculous healing does take place. God is powerful and no one can limit God.

God has healed many in spectacular ways. I read in the book 'Miracle in the Mirror' that God healed Nita Edwards of Sri Lanka of her paralysis at 3.30 p.m. on the 11th of February 1977, a year after her accident had left her paralysed.

What impressed me most was that when the awesome presence of God enveloped her, she forgot about her body. "Just at half past three in the evening, He came into the room with blinding glory, phenomenal brilliance, impossible radiance. Nita gazed into His face and everything within her struggled to reach out to Him. Her healing was no more a factor. She was unaware of her own physical condition. Her physical realm had evaporated. She only longed to touch Him... to connect somehow with that fabulous source of light and love."

Praise God for such miracles ! On the other hand, God did not heal Joni Earecson Tada of U.S.A., who has been a quadriplegic for more than a decade now. (Joni has dealt with this issue in her book "A Step Further"). But she is used internationally, not only to bring people with disabilities to the Lord, but also to encourage the churches to accept them.

Whether we are sick or whole in body on this earth, we will have a transformed body without any sickness, deformity or disability, when we meet Him. So what is important is to prepare ourselves for eternity.

Remember Lazarus who was covered with sores, begging at the gate of the rich man who lived in luxury. When they both died, Lazarus was seated at the bosom of Abraham and the rich man suffered in hell.

Those who have experienced the love and grace of our Lord Jesus Christ in a very personal way do not worry about their physical healing as long as they have settled the question about their spiritual healing. Physical disability need not be a stumbling block, but may be a stepping stone to true spirituality.

"Even though I have experienced God's healing in my severe back problem, God has not healed my blindness" says Mrs. Rona Gibb, a missionary with a visual impairment, to India from U.K. She adds that her disability has never been a hindrance to her knowing the Living God. In fact she is the only one, who is a true Christian in her extended family. She was not merely satisfied with being a Christian, but became a missionary to India, far away from her home. Married to a sighted person, she is a living example of Gods ability manifested in her.

Param, a visually impaired young man working for India Fellowship For The Visually Handicapped, became blind at the age of 16. Hailing from a Hindu background, he would never have known about Christ but for his blindness. "I don't regret being blind because I will see Jesus with my own eyes one day," says Param delightedly.

What about Fanny Crosby, who became one of the most gifted and treasured hymn writers in Christian history? Her 8,000 songs are sung in the churches even today.

"All things work together for good to those who love Him," was the source of strength for the paraplegic surgeon, Dr. Mary Varghese, of South India. She became paraplegic herself, after a major road accident in 1954. Her personal rehabilitation in Australia gained her greater independence, which enabled her to make life easier for other paraplegic people. This work won her the prestigious Padma Shri Award from the

Government of India. The Indian Medical Council also honoured her. The World Vision International gave her the international Dr. Bob Pierce Award, in recognition of her unusual service aimed at improving life for disabled people.

Marilyn Baker, now one of the U.K.'s top selling gospel artistes, became blind soon after birth. Her search for God led to her conversion in her teenage years, and her faith in Jesus inspires not only her songs but her life!

God has been exercising His ability in man's disability from time immemorial through different means and methods.

So, if God touches the life of a disabled person with his healing power, may God be praised! However, if a person is not healed, but his disability turns out to be an opportunity for him/her to know God's ability praise be to God!

12 - LET US PREPARE THE BRIDE

It was a great occasion on an auspicious day. The whole house was decorated with streamers and flowers of different hues. Men were busy in the living room giving the finishing touches. The women were kept busy in the kitchen. The rattling of vessels was subdued, thankfully, by the music in the house. Children were the happiest of all, freely running about.

It was the second marriage in that Indian home. It should have been the third one, but for the affliction of the eldest daughter.

The bride was getting dressed up, assisted by her friends. An elderly man, who appeared to be her father, was seen walking up and down the house restlessly. Could it be that he was trying to hide something from the guests?

"Everything is ready," the mother said, coming out of the kitchen.

Suddenly some of the children came running, exclaiming, "They are coming! They are coming!"

It was the bridegroom's party. A strange silence spread throughout the house.

Meanwhile, Padmini, the eldest girl sat silently, leaning on the well in the courtyard. This had been her place of refuge since the marriage function started. "Oh when would all this end?" she longed to know, for then she could freely move around the house as usual. She was unable to think clearly because of the noise from inside.

As the sound of music and the beating of drums came to a halt, the hush that fell aroused Padmini's curiosity. It overcame even the fear in her and she inched her way to the back door, very cautiously, to know what was happening.

For a moment she forgot herself and got engulfed in the contagiously blissful mood in the air.

"Bad omen! Bad omen!" A voice came rushing towards Padmini. A hand pushed her into the backyard. When she had composed herself, Padmini knew that it was her father who pushed her out. "Bad omen indeed!" she cried vehemently when she went back to the well outside. As she leaned on its wall, tears rolled down her soft, but soiled cheeks. The questions that pounded her heart at that moment were: "why am I blind?" "What have I done to be in this plight?"

Before her feeble thoughts could find an answer, the loud clatter of the drums, resounding blessings to the newly wedded couple, began to disturb her thoughts.

While Padmini ached inside herself, the mood inside the house was very different. There the groom stood with the yellow nuptial cord in his hands. Tying this cord around the bride's neck would be the climax of the evening's function and the culmination of the marriage ceremony. The bride stood before him beautifully adorned with gold ornaments and a glittering silk saree.

"What a cruel father he was!" you may exclaim with a tinge of accusation in your voice.

But you are no better than that father, as long as you have not done anything positive for the disabled people around you.

As members of the Universal Church, the Bride, you and I are preparing ourselves to meet the Bridegroom. Like the father in his family, you and I could be hiding a defect within the Body of our church, - God's family - when we create an atmosphere in the church that is discouraging to disabled people. Could you ever imagine presenting Christ with a Bride that has been deprived of an organ, an eye or an ear or a nose? How then, could we have a church that is deprived of its disabled people?

Let us join our hands to obey the command of the Master who said, "Go ye into all the world and preach the Gospel to every creature," Mark 16:15 (KJV) (which includes all the people with disabilities), so that the Bride may be fully adorned with all people including those who have disabilities. When they hear the trumpet of Christ's second coming, the blind will then see, the lame will leap, the deaf will hear and the maimed will move to meet their Master, the eternal Bridegroom and take their place among the Bride's beautiful adorning jewels.

To this cause I dedicate this book and encourage you, dear reader,
to prepare His Bride.