

The Less Traveled Path to Christ

Families, Autism and the Church Today



Sorrow, Hope, and Joy: Life in the Mountains and Valleys of the Psalms.

The Statistic

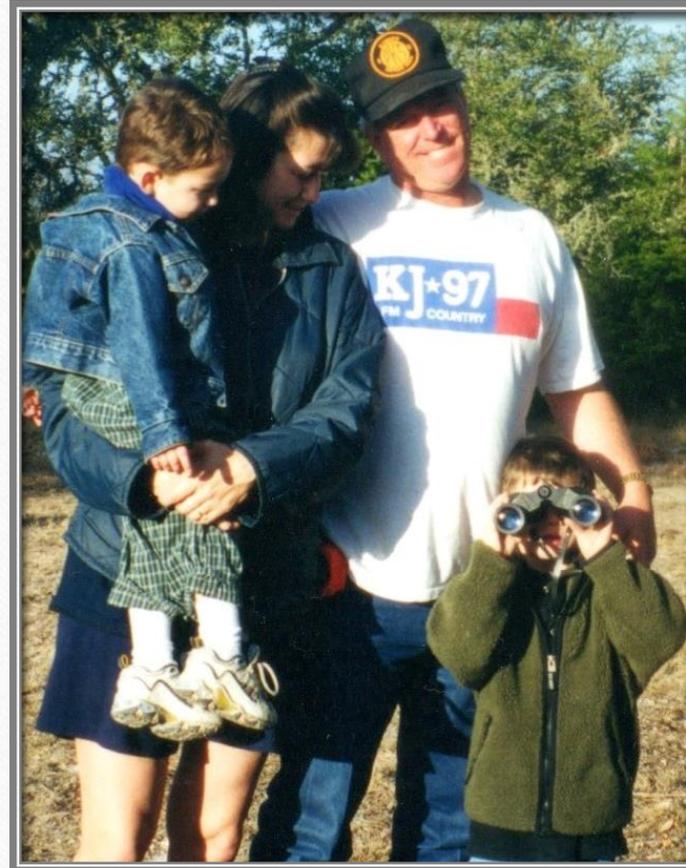
About 7 million
(roughly 14 percent)

of public school **students ages 3 to 21**
in the United States
have some kind of disability

Source: U.S. Department of Education



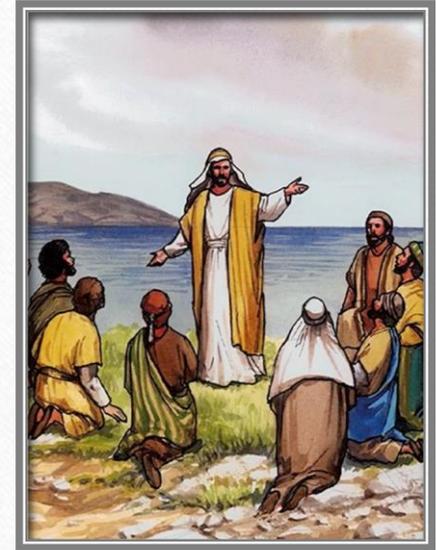
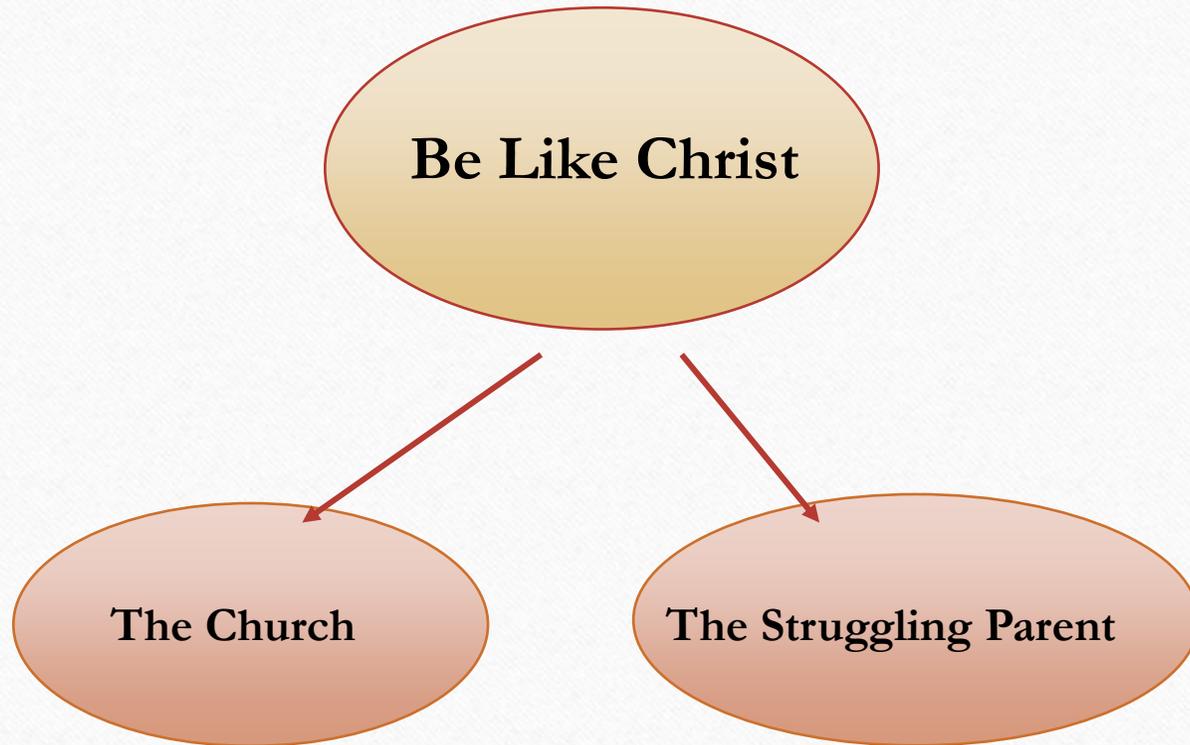
Our family is part of
that growing statistic



The Challenge

The many challenges resulting from disabilities such as Autism, Depression, Anxiety, ADHD and Developmental Delays often keep Kids (and parents) away from Church Services

THE Solution



Proverbs 3:5-6

Trust in the LORD with all your heart And do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge Him, And He will make your paths straight.

**What does the Bible say about
the disabled?**

Leviticus 19:14

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



Proverbs 31:8

Speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves, for the rights of all who are destitute. Speak up and judge fairly; defend the rights of the poor and needy.



Luke 14:13-14

But when you give a feast, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, and you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you. For you will be repaid at the resurrection of the just.”



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?”



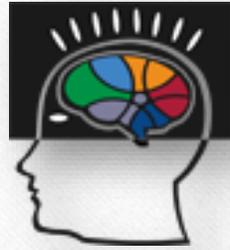


Church Inclusion begins with Understanding Gods Design

Your child was made by a loving and powerful God, and He does not make mistakes!
Understanding Gods design is a great place to start inclusion for anyone... parent or church body. Different can be frightening.

“Don’t worry about the
impairments that God
included in the package...think
about the good stuff in the
package God gave you”
-Samuel Allen





ASPERGERS 101

Your Resource for High-Functioning Autism and Aspergers Syndrome

How does it “feel”
to Have autism?



Samuel Allen

What might 'different' look like?

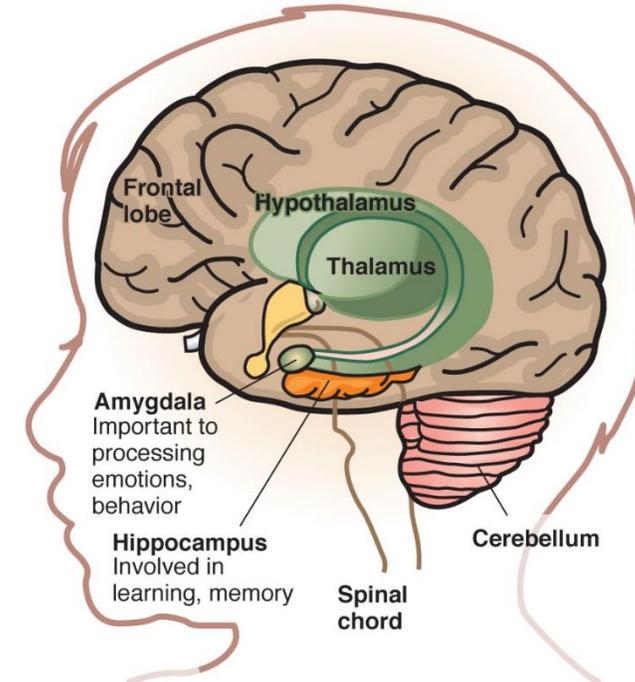
Autism Spectrum Disorders

Three structural differences

- 1) Motor Control
- 2) Social Interaction
- 3) Sensory Issues

Autism and the brain

The areas of the brain affected by autism, which stems from abnormal brain development:



Affect on brain cells (neurons)

- Cells are smaller, more densely packed in certain areas

- Have shorter, less developed branches

Source: The Journal of NIH Research

© 2012 MCT

Commons Signs of Autism

- Avoiding eye contact
- Delayed speech and communication skills
- Reliance on rules and routines
- Being upset by relatively minor changes
- Unexpected reactions to sounds, tastes, sights, touch and smells
- Difficulty understanding other people's emotions
- Focusing on or becoming obsessed by a narrow range of interests or objects
- Engaging in repetitive behavior such as flapping hands or rocking

Action Plan

- 1) **Creating Sanctuary** - Suggestions for the Church
- 2) **Finding Sanctuary** - Suggestions for the Parent

Creating Sanctuary

Suggestions for the Church



We must put aside our fear of “different” of those with disabilities by first understanding the uniquely wired brain that each is blessed with, and then providing accommodation(s) in our own church communities.

Creating Sanctuary

Suggestions for the Church

The Most



- Designate a Disabilities Church Liaison

The Least



- Train current staff and church members

Church Training

Designate: Disabilities Church Liaison

Job Description:

Create and implement a church 'action plan' to welcome, accommodate and engage families and/or persons with disabilities.



Disabilities Church Liaison

Responsibilities May Include

- Create a Church Library of Resources for Families with Special Needs. No need to create, there are plenty of resources out there through non-profits and education systems. Knowledge is power and though the church is not a medical office for serving special needs clients, they can offer some reading material for those who seem lost.
- Engage your church welcoming committee to spot families of children with various disabilities. Train them in knowing to offer a 'quiet space' in case of sensory overload or disclose other accommodations if needed. May learn the 'give me a high-five" method!
- Start a peer 'buddy' program for your youth/teen ministry. Oftentimes there are young people who have a talent for helping others and this will engage them (and others more shy) to friend an otherwise overlooked youth with a disability.
- An option to consider: If church members would like to disclose their child's disability, provide a card with helpful questions to better accommodate the child during service or classes. Questions such as: "What, if any, sensory issues may impede concentration? (circle all that apply) Loud or sudden noises, babies crying, florescent lights, congregational singing, etc..."
- Provide quarterly training to church members brining in local experts from non-profits or medical organizations. Go over current programs/accomodations offered through the church and be open to listen.
- Offer a class that offers peace and Biblical direction for families challenged with a disability.
- Provide take-home or on-line lesson plans for families unable to attend when meltdowns occur or a bad week leaves them exhausted.

Train Church Staff

- Create a quiet “safe space” which is no more than a room that people could retreat to when church service or class becomes too noisy
- Provide a Church Library of Resources for Families with Special Needs. No need to create, there are plenty of resources out there through non-profits and education systems. Knowledge is power and though the church is not a medical office for serving special needs clients, they can offer some reading material for those who seem lost.
- Educate your church welcoming committee to spot families of children with various disabilities. Have them offer your church’s ‘quiet space’ in case of sensory overload.
- Start a peer ‘buddy’ program for your youth/teen ministry. Oftentimes there are young people who have a talent for helping others and this will engage them (and others more shy) to friend an otherwise overlooked youth with a disability.
- An option to consider: If the church member would like to disclose their child’s disability, provide a card with helpful questions to better accommodate the child during service or class. Questions such as: “What, if any, sensory issues may impede concentration? (circle all that apply) Loud or sudden noises, babies crying, florescent lights, congregational singing, etc. “Emergency contact information”, “anything else we, as church staff, should know to overt meltdown?”
- Offer a class that offers peace and Biblical direction for families challenged with a disability.
- Provide take-home or on-line lesson plans for families unable to attend when meltdowns occur or a bad week leaves them exhausted. Many churches offer live-stream services that are cataloged on their website. Be sure and promote this excellent resource/service!

Finding Sanctuary

Suggestions for the Parent

John 9:1-3

As he passed by, he saw a man blind from birth. And his disciples asked him, “Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?” Jesus answered, “It was not that this man sinned, or his parents, but that the works of God might be displayed in him.”



God's Got You. Faithfully Follow His Plan

7 Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you.

8 Be alert and of sober mind. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour.

9 Resist him, standing firm in the faith, because you know that the family of believers throughout the world is undergoing the same kind of sufferings.

10 And the God of all grace, who called you to his eternal glory in Christ, after you have suffered a little while, will himself restore you and make you strong, firm and steadfast.

- 1 Peter 5:7-10



Suggestions for the Parent

- You will have to do things differently. First, more might rest on you teaching God's word than the Sunday school teacher, but they will learn it just the same through you and who God has appointed to influence them. It's just in different ways!
- Some youth groups are very inclusive to children with disabilities...more now than ever! However, if you are new to a congregation and there is a 'click' already formed, you may need to provide your own inclusive pew experience during service. Remember, consistency is key so find the area of the church that works for your child's needs. We found a place not too far from the exit, not too close to the cry room and near kind, welcoming seniors that always offered a smile! You may hurt for the youth group loss but they won't as much as you do if a consistent plan, that eases their disability challenges, is in place.
- If the Biblical stories of David and Goliath are not brought to life in Sunday school, it can be just as impactful by viewing a video series of the Bible at home! Remember, with autism, they understand by visualization. Watching Bible stories together, has brought to life the same lessons for my son as I had learned in my youth. He has been just as impressed with God's message although it had to be delivered in a more quiet setting with time set aside by us.
- When you are struggling with someone taking advantage of your child's disabilities, whether that's by not including them or bullying, try to take a second to pray for them. Pray that their eyes will be open to the value of all people, and that God will help to soften their heart.
- Know that there is a special purpose for your child. God does not make mistakes and medical science is just now realizing that for every deficit the brain function incurs, there is a gift or an ability that is been given. That is the power of your child and Gods design!

Know that you have been prepared for the road less traveled

God will not give you more than you can bear and He (the Almighty) prepared you, as he did your child, for this journey. Know the path of your child and the church is going to be much different than the path you took in your youth. You probably already know this and are hurting. Rest assured that God is close to you and you are not alone in your journey.



Philippians 4:13

I can do all things through Him who strengthens me.

The Less Traveled Path to Christ

Families, Autism and the Church Today



For a copy of this presentation: www.aspergers101/the-less-traveled-path-to-christ-families,-autism-and-the-church-today