

# the 5 stages

changing attitudes

## STAGE 1: IGNORANCE

Weaknesses and disabilities are a sign that God either does not care or is not able to fix the situation. In fact, they may be a result of sin or a lack of faith. God is not involved in the life of someone with a disability, because He can't use people who are so broken. I do not know people with disabilities, nor do I know anything about disabilities. I have no interest in getting to know them or to know more about their life.

## STAGE 2: PITY

I feel sorry for people with disabilities. It's too bad, really. I am blessed by God and I can help others. I am grateful that my children are not disabled. People with weaknesses and disabilities obviously need someone like me to help them and give them meaning, due to their troubles. I really don't see any meaning or purpose to their lives.

## STAGE 3: CARE

Like me, people with disabilities were created in God's image. By that virtue alone they have value. I hope that someone will take the time to show them God's love, and I will happily support such an effort. In fact, I think we need to find ways to help those people. Maybe we should start a special church education class, or respite care for the sake of the parents.

## STAGE 4: FRIENDSHIP

I have come to know and spend time with a friend who has a disability. This person has value in God's sight, but also in mine, and I know that my life is better for having known this person, and as much as I have helped her, she has also blessed me. In fact, I now like to initiate relationships with people who have disabilities. God brings many different people into my church and community, including people with disabilities, and we all benefit as we grow in friendship with each other.

## STAGE 5: CO-LABORERS

If God has called each of us to serve and praise Him with every fiber of our beings, then He has done the same for our brothers and sisters in Christ with disabilities. I think ministry should not just be to people with disabilities, but with or alongside people who have disabilities. Together, we will encourage and equip each other, with and without disabilities, into every good work to respond to God's call on our lives. We can all give and we can all receive.

BUILDING AWARENESS PROVIDING ACCESS INTEGRATING ENGAGING

# TALKING POINTS - PRESENTING THE “CHANGING ATTITUDES” JOURNEY

The following are general guidelines to help you prepare your own presentation of the 5 Stages. These guidelines were prepared by Mark Stephenson and Terry De Young, directors of the Disability Concerns ministries of the Christian Reformed Church of North America and the Reformed Church of America, respectively.

## INTRODUCTION

Becoming a congregation where everybody belongs and everybody serves is not an action but a journey.

Define disability: “Persons with disabilities include those who have long-term physical, mental, intellectual, or sensory impairments which in interaction with various barriers may hinder their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others.” (U.N. Convention on Rights of Persons with Disabilities)

Highlight what your own church has done to become more inclusive of people with disabilities. Give specific examples including building accessibility (ramps, bathrooms, etc.), communication accessibility (large print bulletins, hearing loops, etc.), ministries (Friendship, inclusion of children with disabilities in youth programs, etc.), and involvement in ministry (make a general reference to people with disabilities on committees and serving in ministry in a variety of ways).

## TRANSITION

Invite people to look at the diagram on the front that moves from “Ignorance” to “Co-Laborers.”

## SELF-ASSESSMENT

Invite people to assess their own relationship with people who have disabilities by asking themselves questions like these: How do I feel when I am with

someone who has a disability — fear, pity, disgust, concern, appreciation, enjoyment, admiration? How do I treat this person — ignore, greet, interact and engage? What have I done to make our church more welcoming to people who live with disabilities?

## CHURCH ASSESSMENT

Encourage members to think about where their church is at on this journey: If someone with wheelchair came to our church, could she get in, use the bathroom, sit in the sanctuary with her family? If a boy with autism and behavior issues came to our Sunday School, would leaders ask his parents not to bring him back, or would they work to find out how they can best include him? How often do our members visit or phone members who do not attend church because of depression or some physical disability? What do we need to do next to continue on the journey of disability attitudes: build awareness, provide access, encourage integration, or engage people with disabilities?

## CONCLUSION

Sixty-seven percent of families affected by disability have left a church because they did not feel welcome. Of that 67 percent, one third of them not only left their congregation, but also left their faith tradition. Do we want to be a church that drives away people affected by disability, or that engages them as co-laborers in the work of God’s kingdom?

# IMPORTANT SCRIPTURES

John 9:1-3, 2 Corinthians 11:30, 2 Corinthians 12:9 — God uses a life with disabilities to display the power of Christ.

1 Corinthians 1:27, 12:14, 18, 22-25 — We need one another in the body of Christ.

Luke 14:13-14, 21-23 — Christ calls us to include everyone.

Psalms 139:13-14, Ephesians 2:10 — God designed each person for his express purpose in this world.

2 Timothy 3:16-17, 1 Thessalonians 5:11 — God has called and equipped all His children to serve His Kingdom.

- thanks to Wendie Benton for her submissions

# THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATION

**We are all disabled, but we are also not all disabled** — we are all broken, yes, but some of us truly do face more difficulty, need more help, etcetera.

**Disability is not a curse, but it is also not a blessing** — God somehow works His will despite and sometimes even because of, a disability.

We are not valuable because of what we accomplish (because we are able) or simply because we are different (because we are disabled). **We are valuable because we are created in God’s image, and because of His work in, through, and around our lives.**

# OTHER RESOURCES

*Same Lake, Different Boat*  
Stephanie Hubach

*GLUE Training Manual*  
Barb Newman

*Inclusion Handbook*  
Mark Stephenson and Terry De Young

*Including People with Disabilities in Faith Communities*  
Dr. Erik Carter

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