

## **BIBLICAL JUSTICE INCLUDES DISABILITY ISSUES**

Biblical justice encompasses a wide range of human rights and dignity issues, including disability rights. I (Doug Gentile) and James 2 Association are strongly advocating for disability related issues including removing physical barriers and making accommodations/modifications. But it goes deeper: there are attitude issues directed at people with disabilities-- especially important issue for Christians given multiple Biblical commands to love and care for the most mistreated and marginalized among us.

Historically, persons with disabilities were marginalized, shunned and considered less of human beings than other people. That is why the term “handicap” is so offensive, because it points to generational realities of people with disabilities standing in the street, cap in hand begging, relegated to the fringes of society and almost never in the mainstream. Given that sad history, the current marginalizing, rejecting, shunning and dehumanizing of people with disabilities is a very sensitive issue, and is often considered emotional abuse. Yet this type of attitude remains a pressing social disease, holding back and hurting many people with disabilities.

The multiple disabilities I have, combined with my following God’s calling to share my cancer story, and God’s miracles in keeping me strong through these disabilities, have placed me on the cusp of the attitudinal crisis impacting people with disabilities. Via outreach and day to day living with cancer, I have both witnessed and experienced harmful attitudes toward persons with disabilities, re: being shunned, rejected and marginalized.

Previously, if I witnessed or experienced these shunning attitudes, I would often remain silent. God recently convicted me that silence is not acceptable, because that silence can be hurtful to other people with disabilities—and even to my own mental health if I repeatedly internalize this emotional abuse on top of physical trials, without addressing it head-on. Thus, it is no surprise that God via His power and providence, has handed disability rights to James 2 Association as a calling in addition to Christian racial reconciliation, by speaking both to me and the new James 2 Association President.

God has even provided a blueprint for addressing disability attitude issues: raise the issue privately with the individual—not with a spirit of anger or vengeance, but one of positively encouraging more Godly behavior in the

hurtful person, so that ultimately other persons with disabilities can benefit from a change of attitude, and awareness. If the person persists with the hurtful attitude after the private counseling, and the emotional abuse involves a third party and not ourselves, then prayerfully consider followup intervention on behalf of the victim of the emotional abuse. If the emotional abuse is directed at myself and the person is unrepentant, then forgive the person, pray for the person, and make sure that the emotional abuse is removed from my life by setting personal boundaries and/or exorcizing that individual from my day to day life. Additionally, the calling is to advocate and teach, in general, the need to overcome unloving attitudes, and also to continue the momentum of physical barrier removal and providing reasonable accommodation or modifications. Ephesians 5, vs. 11-13 commands us to shine the light on evil—for the benefit of hurting people and for the Glory of God. The above formula is similar of the formula James 2 Association uses when addressing racial barriers in the Christian church.

God has shown us how critically important addressing attitude issues are. Emotional abuse on top of physical disabilities can create dangerous conditions for persons with certain medical issues. Thus, speaking the truth in love in pro-actively addressing emotional abuse may even save a life or two.

### **BRIEF THREE PARAGRAPH FICTION VIGNETTE:**

#### **Josy and Suzy:**

**Josy says to Suzy,** “I love you like a sister, but please do not bother me on my vacation.”

**Suzy answers Josy,** “Please imagine that you have the following medical conditions: You don’t know which swallow of food might choke you to death because inflammation made you esophagus narrow just below the windpipe. You don’t know which second could bring you down with a stroke or heart attack because of high blood pressure resistant to medication. You have gone up to straight 30 hours without sleep, and are permanently living with jetlag from sleep disruptions. Your muscles and bones are so weak that a bump could cause a fracture, and uneven shoes can have a ripple effect that you injure a tendon or ligament for weeks at a time. The pain in your wrists is so severe that you cannot open many bottle caps. Please consider living with these realities, among others, day by day, month by

month, year by year, with no recognized medical cures for these conditions. Then come talk to me about bothering you on your vacation.”

Josy and Suzy both address the issue in prayer, and recognize, in the words of singer Katy Nichole, that we have a God of Possible, and that God can and does do miracles in response to any medical ailment or disabling condition.