

PERSPECTIVE

SEPTEMBER 2019

seeing

GOD'S GLORY

in disability



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Seeing God's Glory in Disability

Kevin Vaughter

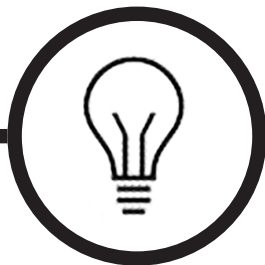


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BIBLE READING PLAN 5

Take Up & Read

September

Seeing God's Glory in Disability

MY PATH TO UNDERSTANDING DISABILITY

I vividly remember the phone call I received that night at the hospital. The doctors had put Leyna on various medications to try and stop labor at week 32 of her pregnancy with our first son. I felt overwhelmed as a husband and hopeful dad-to-be, and in that moment, I struggled to remember God's sovereignty. On what would end up being the last night before Braeden was born, I received a timely call from our new pastor. It was Aaron calling to pray with me and for our family. I don't know exactly why, but I broke down. Looking back, I see how much encouragement from a brother helped in an uncertain time—a simple phone call from a brother pointing me to Christ.

Since then, and after we found out later that Braeden was severely mentally disabled and non-verbal, the church has loved and encouraged our family in countless ways. Early on, I struggled with Braeden's disability. Not so much in a "why did this happen to us" way, but in a "fairness" way—how can my son be made in such a way that he may not even understand or comprehend the gospel that we are called to proclaim? This led me to more in-depth biblical study, more in-depth spiritual conversations, and even to a systematic theology class at MVBC. God was already using my son's disability to display his glory and to grow me in faith, even though I didn't fully see it at the time.

John 9 was one of the first passages I came to in this season. It was referenced in a paper by John Piper. I had read this passage before, but this time God was opening my eyes to better understand the first few verses in particular: "As he passed by, he saw a man blind from birth. ² And his disciples asked him, 'Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?' ³ Jesus answered, 'It was not that this man sinned, or his parents, but that the works of God might be displayed in him'" (John 9:1–3). As I meditated on this passage, and other passages like Exodus 4:11 where the sovereignty of God in his creation is unmistakable, I felt a peace. God's wisdom is pure, it's holy, and it's good. He made Braeden exactly as he is for his glory.

GLORIFYING GOD THROUGH DISABILITY

Learning to Trust God's Perfect Plan

Does this mean that I don't still struggle? No. In a fallen world, it doesn't. In my own sin, I can often forget that God's ways are perfect and that he loves his church. Having a disabled child, and one that may or may not have much capacity to understand the gospel, pushes me to trust in God's plan more and not in my own agenda. I must rest in his character and goodness as

displayed throughout Scripture (see Matthew 15:30–31). This fact is no different for any parent who has a child that's still in infancy or at the age where they still have trouble understanding or grasping their own sin.

For any family that is struggling with disability, the best thing we can do is press into the church, all the while praying for humility in dealing with others. One sin that can seep into my own life is pride. I can think, "This person can't understand what our family is going through, so I won't engage with them." I would encourage those families affected by disability to trust in God's good plan and look for ways to encourage others in the church in the midst of your struggles. This can be a powerful way to display God's glory and how he is working in your family.

Walking with Others in the Midst of Their Suffering

Though having a child with disabilities is challenging, it's provided us with opportunities that we would not otherwise have. One of the joys and privileges God has given me is the opportunity to meet with other members who are also affected by disabilities, some of which are mental, some physical, all worthy to be loved and cared for as they are made in the image of God. For example, I have been meeting with a dear brother for over a year now, sharing our struggles, encouraging and praying for each other and our families, and ultimately, pointing each other to Christ. It is such a blessing to be able to walk with others in this way.

You certainly don't have to be a person or family affected by a disability to meet with and encourage someone who is affected by it. Ask a brother or sister if it's okay to learn more about a family member's disability. It's not a 'one glove fits all' scenario. Some families may be very open and just waiting to talk about it, while others may not—and that's okay. Give them time and pray. Following up with a family with very real interest and seeking to know their situation more intimately can go a long way. If you do learn more about the child or adult's disability, you can better know how to pray and encourage. This is one small way we can help bear each other's burdens (Galatians 6:2).

BEING A CHURCH THAT LOVES THE DISABLED

Encouraging One Another with the Gospel

As the body of Christ, we are called to love, encourage, and help each other in our Christian walk. The writer of Hebrews exhorts the body to persevere both personally and corporately:

"Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful. ²⁴ And let us consider how to stir up one

another to love and good works,²⁵ not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near” (Hebrews 10:23–25).

Paul explains how the body of Christ should work in 1 Corinthians 12:21–26 and reminds the church in verse 26, “If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together.” This is something MVBC does well. Our family has been so encouraged by the many ways the church has loved us and our son. God has used the service of others to strengthen our faith. It’s this *‘encouraging one another’* that the writer of Hebrews is pleading with the church to do.

Though it may seem counterintuitive, I have been very encouraged by the honesty of some dear brothers and sisters who have been willing to openly and honestly say things like, “Brother, I don’t know what to say or how to respond at times about Braeden.” It can be tempting to shy away from talking about disabilities because we live in a world full of messages of ‘positivity’ and ‘health/wellness.’ That thinking can also tempt us to speak in ways that may not be helpful in encouraging a family affected by disability. Though they come from a heart of love, comments like, “Oh, my daughter didn’t talk early on, but she eventually did! Your son will get there,” or “I’m sure God wouldn’t give you more than you could handle,” or “God doesn’t want you to suffer; it will get better!” often do more harm than good.

It’s helpful to remember that God’s Word doesn’t convey the prevalent worldview. As Christians, we will suffer in various ways for the sake of the gospel. It can be physical suffering, mental suffering, societal suffering, or other ways. When we look at disabilities from a biblical worldview, we see a very different type of encouragement found. It’s an encouragement rooted in Christ and what he has done—the gospel truth that Jesus lived a perfect sinless life, suffered and died the death we deserve, yet rose again to defeat death and sin. Ultimately, we are all disabled by sin apart from God’s saving grace. We need to be reminded of this fact daily.

Serving the Disabled and Their Families

As a church body, we have the great privilege of caring for the disabled in our midst and supporting their families. The Bible is clear on how we are to care for orphans, widows, the weak, and I would say it’s not a stretch to include the disabled in that group. Psalm 82:3 states, “Defend the weak and the fatherless; uphold the cause of the poor and the oppressed.” It is our calling to protect and advocate for the disabled. Find out if there are ways that you can help during worship service or Sunday school so that the

parents or siblings can have time apart to sit under teaching or preaching. Some may gladly accept, others may not, but it never hurts to ask. We must also pray for each other that we would persevere—not only the families of the disabled, but every church member. Pray too that we, the families of the disabled, will be honest about our struggles and fears.

SEEING THE WORKS OF GOD DISPLAYED

I like one of the statements made in a 2004 Disability Ministry presentation¹ to the elders at Bethlehem Baptist church in Minneapolis, MN:

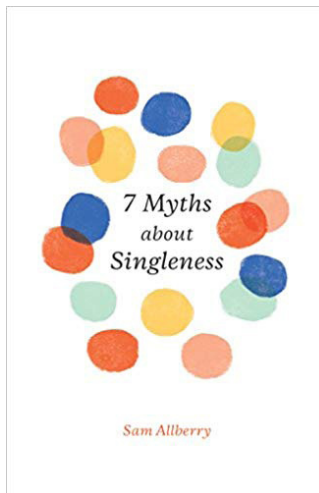
“Of course prayers (for the disabled) for healing are appropriate and biblical. And if given the opportunity, nearly everyone with a disability or the parent of a disabled child would gladly accept such healing. We know from the Bible, however, that God uses suffering of all kinds to glorify his name. Thus, a more visible presence of those with disabilities brings opportunity for a fuller expression of confidence in God. *We must desire God more than we desire comfort in this present age.*”

If we really drill down into that last statement, it should affect all of us in every aspect of our lives. As Braeden’s dad, I must submit to God and desire him above my own worldly desires—whether that be more rest, more travel, or an easier path with my son. For others, that may mean giving up something you enjoy or some of your time to invest in a family that is struggling with a disabled family member. It’s my prayer that we as a church desire God more, marvel at his works daily, trust his perfect plan, and remember what Paul wrote to the church in Corinth: “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness. Therefore, I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses so that the power of Christ may rest upon me. For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities. For when I am weak, then I am strong” (2 Corinthians 12:8–10).

– Kevin Vaughter

7 Myths about Singleness

Written by Sam Allberry



Many people today have a skewed view of singleness. Our world is obsessed with the idea of sex, romance, and intimacy. Inside the church, many rightly emphasize the goodness of marriage for pointing to the gospel. But what of the goodness of singleness? In *7 Myths about Singleness*, Sam Allberry addresses seven misconceptions about singleness, ultimately pointing to the gift that it is and the sufficiency of Christ.

- *Myth 1: Singleness is Too Hard:* Look to the example of Jesus, who lived a single life and was the most perfect person to walk the earth.
- *Myth 2: Singleness Requires a Special Calling:* The gift of singleness is not for some who have a special calling while others are waiting for God to get around to giving them their gift of marriage. But rather, singleness itself is a gift for as long as one is single.
- *Myth 3: Singleness Means No Intimacy:* Intimacy isn't only found in the context of romance, but also through deep friendships.
- *Myth 4: Singleness Means No Family:* The church provides family for the single.
- *Myth 5: Singleness Hinders Ministry:* Just as marriage isn't a qualification for ministry, singleness isn't a hindrance.
- *Myth 6: Singleness Wastes Your Sexuality:* Sexual unfulfillment itself becomes a means of deepening our sense of the fuller, deeper satisfaction we await in Jesus. It helps us hunger more for him.
- *Myth 7: Singleness is Easy:* Many deep hardships lie within singleness. It is not our own capacity and strength we must rely on, but God's.

I would put this book in the hands of every member of the church if I could. For the single, it will bring profound encouragement. For the married person, this book will help you better understand and care for singles in the church. Personally, I can't remember the last time I read a book that moved me as deeply as this one. As a single, I wept with Allberry as he told of situation after situation I knew too well: unhelpful comments, loss of friends, loneliness, and fear of the future. But his words of truth, pointing to the goodness of singleness and the hope we have in Christ, were a balm to my soul and a much needed reminder in a culture, even a church culture, that is so prone to myths about the single life.

– RECOMMENDED BY CAROLINE MCGILL

Excerpts From the Book

1

"Singleness for us now is also a way of bearing witness to the reality, like Jesus, we can live in a way that anticipates what is to come. Singleness now is a way of saying that this future reality is so certain and so good that we can embrace it now. It is a way of declaring to a world obsessed with sexual and romantic intimacy that these things are not ultimate and that in Christ what we possess is. **If marriage shows the shape of the gospel, singleness shows us its sufficiency.**"

– Singleness Wastes Your Sexuality, p.120

2

"This is why the church needs single people. Not as a supposedly endless source of free babysitting, but to remind us that the joy and fulfillment of marriage in this life is partial and can only be temporal. The presence of singles who find their fullest meaning and satisfaction in Christ is a visible, physical testimony to the fact that the end of all our longing comes in Jesus."

– Singleness Wastes Your Sexuality, p.120

3

"Many of our default settings see singleness in terms of deficiency. It is the absence of a good thing – marriage, and the romantic and sexual fulfillment marriage seems to represent. Single people are *unmarried*, while we would never think of married people as *unsingle*. It is singleness that seems to be wanting and deficient. The only way to cope with it is if God gives you some special superpower. All of this means we can find ourselves quite out of sync with how Paul describes singleness in the New Testament. He speaks of singleness not just being bearable, but as being a gift from God."

– Singleness Requires A Special Calling, p.36

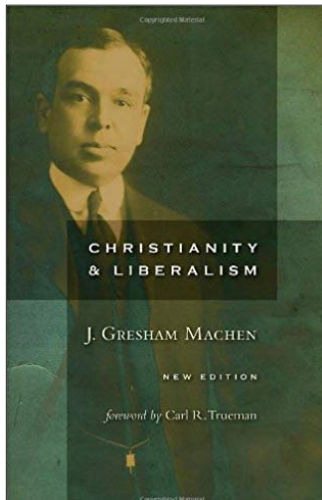
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"If the primary examples of the Christian life that many of us see in church are always married ones, it can reinforce the idea that being married necessarily accompanies Christian maturity."

– Singleness Hinders Ministry, p.100

Christianity and Liberalism

Written by J. Gresham Machen



J. Gresham Machen was born in 1881 and died in 1937. He was the founder of Westminster Theological Seminary in Philadelphia and founder of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church. Machen saw liberalism in the church as leading to a sentimentalized religion that had nothing to do with the God of the Bible. Carl R. Trueman in the forward of the book, notes that the central thesis is that liberalism is not a legitimate form of historic Christianity, but rather a different religion entirely.

Liberalism is as alive and well today as it was in Machen's day. Human beings still try to make God in their own image, projecting their own values onto the divine. Machen believed the only consistent way to oppose liberalism in religion was to maintain the truth of Christianity as a historic religion. He argued that truth can only be maintained when based on the Bible, authoritative because it was divinely inspired. Machen made the case that liberalism is totally different from Christianity. Christianity is founded on the Bible. Liberalism is founded upon the shifting emotions of sinful men.

Machen wrestled with individuals wanting to create their own belief system. In 1923 he published *Christianity and Liberalism*, and it is as relevant today as it was in 1923. Most people believe that there is a god. They believe that God is good. They maintain beliefs that are pleasing to them. A liberal individual may call themselves Christian. At the same time, many have a hard time accepting who Jesus is, for most liberals cannot accept that Jesus is divine. Many see Jesus as a good example for living. By striving to live like Jesus, they believe all will be good, today and at life's end. This is liberalism, and liberalism is not Christianity. Have you ever been told, "Don't be so judgmental. Be more accepting of other's opinions"? This book can help you protect the truth in your life, in your relation to others, and in your church.

This book helped me see why many want to make up their own truth. Man cannot make up Truth. If you have friends with beliefs that cannot be confirmed in the Bible, be prepared to show them God's truth. This book will help you do this.

— RECOMMENDED BY JOHN HALL

Excerpts From the Book

1

"'Christ died' — that is history; 'Christ died for our sins' — that is doctrine. Without these two elements, joined in an absolutely indissoluble union, there is no Christianity."
— Doctrine, p. 23

2

"Christianity differs from liberalism, then, in the first place, in its conception of God. But it also differs in its conception of man." ... According to the Bible, man is a sinner under the just condemnation of God; according to modern liberalism, there is really no such thing as sin. At the very root of the modern liberal movement is the loss of the consciousness of sin."
— God and Man, p. 55

3

"Jesus was not for Paul merely an example for faith; He was primarily the object of faith. The religion of Paul did not consist in having faith in God like the faith which Jesus had in God; it consisted rather in having faith in Jesus."
— Christ, p. 70

4

"According to Christian belief, Jesus is our Saviour, not by virtue of what He said, not even by virtue of what He was, but by what He did. He is our Saviour, not because He inspired us to live the same kind of life that He lived, but because He took upon Himself the dreadful guilt of our sins and bore it instead of us on the cross."
— Salvation, p. 99

SEPTEMBER

These Scripture readings have been selected to help you prepare for the Sunday morning message. Take Up & Read!

September 1	Mark 10:17–31	September 16	Genesis 4:1–16
September 2	Luke 2:22–40	September 17	Hebrews 11:1–7
September 3	Luke 2:41–52	September 18	Genesis 22:1–24
September 4	2 Timothy 1:1–18	September 19	Hebrews 11:8–22
September 5	1 John 2:7–17	September 20	Exodus 2:11–25
September 6	Colossians 3:12–4:1	September 21	Hebrews 11:23–40
September 7	Psalms 78	September 22	Hebrews 11:1–3
September 8	Psalms 78:1–8	September 23	Ezekiel 4–5
September 9	Ezekiel 1:1–14	September 24	Ezekiel 6
September 10	Ezekiel 1:15–28	September 25	Ezekiel 7
September 11	Ezekiel 2	September 26	Ezekiel 8–9
September 12	Ezekiel 3:1–15	September 27	2 Corinthians 3:1–18
September 13	Revelation 4:1–11	September 28	Ezekiel 10–11
September 14	Ezekiel 3:16–27	September 29	Ezekiel 11:14–25
September 15	Ezekiel 1:22–28	September 30	Matthew 3

*Sermons in bold

TAKE UP & READ



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