

Divergence & Jesus: Going Home With Those With Special Needs

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Colossians 1:15-20 and John 9:1-6

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Here in the US, we are all told to we should be chasing money, position, prestige, fame and power. If we cannot attain becoming one of the top 1% of the population, then we should settle down and get a good stable job. In my generation, that idea included owning a home, a wife, 2.5 kids, a dog, a cat, and don't forget the white picket fence. If we have attained these things then we had succeeded. However, I never figured out the half a kid thing. You can have 2 kids or you can have 3 kids, but 2 1/2 kids? If anyone else figured out how to have half a kid, please let me know. Anyways, I digress. To achieve the American Dream, in the American way, there are certain expectations and steps that must be accomplished to do this. All the pieces have to fit together right.

The idea of pieces fitting together reminds me of a story from when I was a kid. After about the age of 10, I grew up in a household that didn't have a lot of money. We may not have lived in the best part of town, but there was always food on the table. One of the things my mother loved to do at the time, but not so much now, was to put together puzzles. We all know how a puzzle works. You look at the picture on the front of the box and put all the pieces together to look like the picture. Each piece must connect together. Well, since we didn't have much money, my Mom would look for new puzzles at garage sales. One day, I came in from playing outside to find my Mom and my Aunt talking about a puzzle. They were talking about how there was a piece missing, a piece that didn't belong to this puzzle in the box and how she couldn't complete the puzzle. It was very frustrating for her because all the pieces didn't fit.

That loops us back to the American Dream. Whether a child is being pressed to succeed, they are expected to perform. They must be the best. They must be the fastest. They must be the most talented. They must be the smartest. They need to be the most athletic. They need to be the best looking. They need to strive for perfection. For if they are not perfect, how are they going to succeed in life? How will they conform to the path laid out for them to success?

While some are asking these questions, I have others. What if they don't meet the criteria? What if the child is not capable of putting together the pieces for the American dream? What if they think differently? What if they act differently? What if they are missing a limb or limbs? What if all of their limbs are there but they can't use them? What if the child cannot see? What if the child cannot hear? What of the child who cannot talk? What if the child exhibits non-typical behaviors or actions? What if the child is unable to take care of themselves at all and will need to spend their lives requiring the same amount of care, or more care, than a newborn baby? What if that child is all grown up now and still doesn't conform to the picture of the puzzle that was laid out for us all?

As much as we might want to think otherwise, that child or that adult is shunned. Oh, don't get me wrong. There are many who are still nice to their face. There are others who genuinely love them anyways. Yet, they don't fit in our puzzle. For someone has quote unquote failed in solving the problem

or problems. A solution wasn't found to help these children be normal and conform to the picture in the puzzle. There are some who might say that these children and their parents deserve our pity. How do you feel about those disabled children and their families? Remember, this is a question for you alone and you only need to answer it to yourself. So, if no one else is going to know the answer, please answer honestly.

Here are some questions that could possibly make people I know uncomfortable. I have 3 autistic children who all show on different parts of the spectrum. 2 of those children have epilepsy. One of those is struggling to learn to speak. Does my family deserve pity? Should I be doing something more to help my children be quote unquote normal? As a Father of special needs children, I could use this time to be angry. I could tell you about the times when strangers tried to give us parenting advice for our quote unquote uncontrolled kids or just gave us horrible looks or just snorted in derision and walked away. On the other hand, I could use this time to be happy. I could use this time to tell you stories of acceptance and returned love. I could use this time to discuss the wonderful people who have just accepted our kids with love when they approached them with love, or more importantly, when they didn't. Yet, no matter how bad the rejection was and no matter how wonderful the acceptance was, my feelings are irrelevant.

Yes, I said my feelings are irrelevant. Although, I fail at many times, I try to gear my life and my thoughts around what the Bible says. That is why I say my feelings are irrelevant. It doesn't matter how I feel. It matters what the Word of God says. If my feelings disagree, well I'll just need to rethink things so I can be in-line with our Creator. So, what does the Bible say about my special need children and the many who have some sort of condition that some might call a disability?

Let's go back to one of the verses that we read today. We read a few extra verses but let's just look back at Colossians 1:15-16. It says; "The Son is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For in Him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things have been created through Him and for Him." Did you hear that; "All things were created for Him and through Him". Let's listen to that again; "All things were created for Him and through Him. That means the rocks and the grass and the trees and the air were all created for Him and Through him. That means the birds, the bears and the fish were all created for Him and through Him. That means You and I were created for Him and through Him. That means my special needs children and every child, regardless of perceived disability, has been created for Him and through Him. God does not make mistakes. God is perfect. Thus, if All things were created for Him and through Him, and God does not make mistakes, then everyone of us were created just as God intended us to be.

I know the next question may be, if everyone was created for Him and through Him, then why would anyone be born with a condition that could be perceived as a disability? Let look at the other verses we read today. We read John 9:1-6 but let's look closer at just John 9:1-3. It says; "As he went along, He saw a man blind from birth. His disciples asked him, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents that he was born blind?" "Neither this man nor his parents sinned," said Jesus, "but this happened so that the works of God might be displayed in Him." Now, if we kept going, we would see

this man was healed of his blindness. However, a healing does not need to take place for the glory of God to be seen. The person does not have to be made like everyone else for it to be a miracle of God.

In Psalm 139:13-14 we read; “For it was you who formed my inward parts; you knit me together in my mother’s womb. I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made. Wonderful are your works that I know very well.” We are knit together by God. Each one of us is a miracle. Each one of reveals the glory of God just by being here and living.

If we are all made the way God intended and we were made that way to reveal the Glory of God, then what is our disconnect with those who have perceived disabilities? Why can’t we understand? Why can’t we be more accepting and loving?

What if I were to say that one of the main reasons we aren’t more accepting is that we have been unknowingly programed into an ideology that is prevalent in our society here in the US. We have been taught that we need to pursue the American Dream. We need to succeed at what we are doing, no matter what that is. If others can’t do that too, then they aren’t the same as us and are in some way less. This may not even be a conscious thought but one that is underneath and directing our reactions to others.

This happens because we end up following the things we were taught by our society and our upbringings rather than what we are taught by Jesus. In Matthew 15:3 we hear; “Jesus replied, “And why do you break the command of God for the sake of your tradition?” Jesus was talking about the traditions of the Pharisees and Sadducees of that time. Yet, we have our own traditions, don’t we? Let me bring up again the tradition of the American Dream.

So, if we are to put aside the American Dream, how should I direct my life? No matter what you do in life, Love the Lord God with all your heart and Love your Neighbor as yourself. Let me read to you these words and I believe it will give you a better idea on how we are to behave? 1 John 3:18–24 tells us; “16 We know love by this, that he laid down his life for us—and we ought to lay down our lives for one another. 17 How does God’s love abide in anyone who has the world’s goods and sees a brother or sister in need and yet refuses help? 18 Little children, let us love, not in word or speech, but in truth and action. 19 And by this we will know that we are from the truth and will reassure our hearts before him 20 whenever our hearts condemn us; for God is greater than our hearts, and he knows everything. 21 Beloved, if our hearts do not condemn us, we have boldness before God; 22 and we receive from him whatever we ask, because we obey his commandments and do what pleases him. 23 And this is his commandment, that we should believe in the name of his Son Jesus Christ and love one another, just as he has commanded us. 24 All who obey his commandments abide in him, and he abides in them. And by this we know that he abides in us, by the Spirit that he has given us.”

Let us stop trying to put each other into a formula for earthly success. Let us begin to become better at living as an example of Jesus. Let us Act in Love. Let us tell each other the truth. Let us follow God’s commandments. Let us do what pleases God. Let us abide in Christ. Let us show the world Christ through the true wisdom that the Holy Spirit has taught us. Let us treat those with perceived disabilities, or who are considered to be divergent or as having special needs as a member of the family of God. Let us treat everyone with love as Jesus taught us.

I hope you will remember this, but I am going to leave you with a story. I had a really hard time deciding what story I was going to leave you with. There are so many that we could talk about from the amazing things my family has done and said. I could talk about one of the many selfless acts from Anthony. I could talk about how Ellianna can light up a room just by walking in. Yet, I finally decided to talk about how Connor continues to teach me about unconditional love. As I am going into ministry, you might think I wouldn't need a lesson like that. However, you would be wrong. Connor's love is innocent and so genuine, it can bring a true joy in others.

At Walmart, we all have experienced the greeter at the door. They welcome us to Walmart and on the way out they may check your receipt to make sure you've paid for everything. With kids of varying ages, the school schedule for our kids has traditionally been staggered. What I mean by that is Anthony needs to be dropped off about 7:30 am for classes to start at 7:40, but Connor doesn't need to be at school till 8:45. So, there have many times that Dawn has squeezed in a quick shopping trip between school drop offs. Every time they went, Connor would go up and say hi to the greeter and give him a hug. The first time this happened, Dawn tried to get Connor to stop hugging the guy so He wouldn't be upset. He said it was ok though. Every time they went, and he was there, Connor would say hi and give him a hug. He learned Connor's name and smiled every time Connor came in. He told Dawn on a couple of occasions on how it always made his day.

I wish I could say that, even after learning from my son, that I had the gumption to walk up and hug a stranger unannounced, but I can't, at least not yet. I am still learning to love as enthusiastically as my children. Yet, I still have much to learn. Jesus gathered the sinners, the misfits, he looked for those who weren't atypical. He found those who had disability, divergence and sickness. He loved us all. He died and was resurrected for us all. Let us follow Him, teach others about following Him, and, like my children, love all of God's people.

Let it be according to His will as He taught us. Amen.