

RAISING A CHILD WITH SPECIAL NEEDS



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Raising a Child with Special Needs

Only those with first-hand experience truly understand the blessing and challenges of raising a child with special needs. Parenting is hard work under the best of circumstances.

When you add managing the needs of a child with physical or mental disabilities, it can bring a whole new level of physical and emotional stress for parents. It also brings a level of joy others rarely comprehend.

Whether you have just recently received a troubling diagnosis, have just moved into a new stage of care, or have just started attending this church, we want to be a source of encouragement and hope as you fulfill your calling to parent a child with special needs.

We believe every child is a gift from God made in His image and reflects His dignity. We also consider those caring for children with special needs worthy of special honor and support. To become intentional about your unique situation, we encourage you to reflect on your blessing, your call, and your challenge.

YOUR BLESSING: A Special Connection

Those nurturing a child with special needs often encounter the heart of God in ways that can only be described as a spiritual mystery. While these children may be unable to participate in certain physical and/or academic pursuits, they can thrive in the most important arena of life—the spirit. Even those who cannot understand the written word of God can embody what it means to love and be loved as one totally dependent upon the Giver and Sustainer of life. Those honored to serve these children are given a unique connection with the God, with whose image they bear, as seen in a gazing smile, a shrieking laugh, or an unspoken moment of delight that proclaims to all “the refreshing

water of God's joy is available to us all". We can entrust our loved ones with special needs to Him with confidence and expectant hope.

OUR CALL: Laying Down Your Life

You have one of the most difficult yet vital callings in the kingdom of God. How can you maintain the ongoing energy and passion needed to parent a child with special needs? There is no other way to do it than to daily embrace the call to lay down your life. Philippians 2 says:

Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made Himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled himself and became obedient to death—even death on a cross. (Philippians 2:5-8)

All Christian parents are called to mirror Jesus by taking on "the very nature of a servant" at home. It is especially real in the midst of the never ending sacrifices demanded of those caring for special needs. Even if those around you never understand the load you bear, you play a part that is immensely important from God's perspective and is credited as serving Christ himself (Matthew 25:40).

YOUR CHALLENGE: Finding Support & Replenishment

Whether your child has mild or severe needs, you require replenishment in order to stay faithful and avoid burnout. You need practical help and spiritual nourishment. Stephen Covey talks about the importance of "sharpening the saw"—of prioritizing physical, emotional, and spiritual restoration so that your efforts can be fueled with new strength and purpose.

You and your child need periodic breaks. Of course, making that happen can be difficult because very few offer to help and those who do may not understand what to do, your child's unique needs, or just how hard it can be. This church offers a variety of ministries for families just like yours because you deserve the opportunity to rest and replenish.

GOING FURTHER—Resources

A Different Kind of Perfect: Writings by Parents on Raising a Child with Special Needs (by Cindy Dowling & Bernadette Thomas) offers comfort, consolation, and wisdom from parents who have been there—and are finding their way through.

I Am in Here: The Journey of a Child with Autism Who Cannot Speak but Finds Her Voice (by Elizabeth M. Bonker & Virginia G. Breen) is the spiritual journey of a mother and daughter who refuse to give up hope, who celebrate their victories, and who keep trying to move forward despite the obstacles.

Chicken Soup for the Soul: Children with Special Needs: Stories of Love and Understanding for Those Who Care for Children with Disabilities (by Jack Canfield & Mark Victor Hansen) offers a glimpse into the lives of others who are on a similar path.



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