



## "Let's Get On With It!" - Creating Inclusive Churches

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In the 21st century, when discussing the inclusion of people with disabilities, churches and pastors often agree it is a "good thing". Still, they often cannot answer the question "How do we do it?" This can be a big stumbling block when discussing inclusion within different social contexts, such as mission - either internationally or at home. Phrases such as "where there is a will, there will be a way" and even "the answer lies

within" may seem disrespectful in response to a genuine question. However, has our desire to look for technology and special services undermined our ability to create inclusion from within our church or community?

One biblical story that does not only include but calls into leadership a person with a disability is particularly fascinating and inspiring: The recruitment of Moses to lead the Israelites out of Egypt. When the job requires public speaking in front of Pharaoh and the unruly mob known as the "children of Israel", would we usually select the candidate who is shy and has communication impairments? We may sympathize with Moses' timid response to God's commission during his "interview" (Exodus 4). Instead of focusing on Moses' disabilities, God focuses on his abilities - his possibilities. Jobs, positions and offices may not directly be denied but not offered to people with disabilities because we cannot see their abilities.

In discussing the Exodus 4 narrative, it is easy to highlight how Moses overcame his history, inhibitions, and impairments. However, how God develops the support to enable everything to happen is far more inspiring to us. Modern-day Voice Machines, or Speech and Language Therapists, were not available. Additionally, neither Pharaoh nor the Israelites were likely to be sympathetic to Moses needing extra time to speak.

God does not ignore Moses' objections - as many as they were, starting in Exodus 3:11 and culminating with the plea about being "slow of speech and tongue" (Exodus 4:10). Instead, God rebukes Moses for using his speech as an excuse, saying, "Who has made man's mouth? Or who makes the mute, the deaf, the seeing, or the blind? Have not I, the Lord?" (v-11) The discussion continues and, in verses 14-16, God says "Is not Aaron the Levite your brother? I know that he can speak well. And look, he is also coming out to meet you. When he sees you, he will be glad in his heart. Now you shall speak to him and put the words in his mouth. And I will be with your mouth and with his mouth, and I will teach you what you shall do."

**IS IT NOT I  
THE LORD?**  
Exodus 4:11

We know little about Moses' speech impairment, short of it requiring a second party to support him to communicate or assist a third party to understand what he was saying. Nevertheless, as a brother to Moses, Aaron is within his immediate family. Although we do not know how long it was since they last met or if they had spent significant time together beforehand, we could assume that Aaron is aware of Moses' impairment.



The solution is “homemade” and effective - as brothers and sisters in Christ, we are to make every effort to be a family and work side by side. We do not always need gadgets and services to enable the inclusion of people with disabilities. As God said to Moses, “Just get on with it!” Inclusion is at least as much about our attitude of mind and having faith that God will provide, as it is about considering the obstacles faced and how we can overcome them. This may require a change in how the church discusses disabled people’s inclusion.

Brokenness is part of being human - we are all broken in our individual ways, longing to be made whole. When thinking and planning how to include people with disabilities, it is important not to plan and do things for them but with them and include them in the process.

Whilst acknowledging that some disabled people may require support to carry out their activity, it is equally true that the church needs to recognize the skills and experiences they can bring in many situations. These may include “problem-solving” when overcoming everyday obstacles, perseverance, and insights into biblical passages as they discuss their lived experience. The change is a learning process and can be facilitated by inviting a church member with mobility impairments to join the church building committee. It may also be by encouraging disabled members to take on roles within our church, including prayers and preaching, children’s Sabbath school and worship leading, and appointment as deacons and elders. As our members see disabled people actively participating in church life, more inclusion will practically be illustrated. Once disabled people are regularly included in church life, their inclusion in mission becomes much easier to envisage.

A good step in the right direction is to sit down with everybody and actually talk, establish relationships and work together. The NEC accessibility questionnaire - an extended and adapted version of the GC questionnaire - is a good place to start the conversation ([Church Building and Programme Accessibility Questionnaire](#)). Going through the questions in church, or a church board setting will provide a starting point to see where we are at on the way to inclusion and participation.

As our church family works through the issues, solutions will emerge. Sometimes they can be in ways that could never have been envisaged beforehand. From there, we will start seeing the skills and insights disabled people can bring to our mission team. Then we may find ourselves asking “why” disabled people are not included more in our activities.

(Recommended Reading: “Disability in Mission: The Church’s Hidden Treasure”).

