



Lutheran
Social Service
of Minnesota

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What Does the Bible say about our Responsibility to Care for People with Disabilities?

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The Gospel of John includes a unique story about an encounter between Jesus and a man who has been unable to walk for 38 years (John 5). In our day, this is clearly a long time to be paralyzed. In the ancient world, however, this would have been a lifetime. Since the average lifespan of a Jewish male was 38-40 years, this man has lived with his disability his entire life. For his whole existence, he has had to rely on the mercy of others. Likely blamed for his illness, as physical ailments were thought to be punishment from God for past sins committed, he had been cast aside, left alone to live a life lacking both love and relationship. And what kind of life is that?

We are called to care for those with disabilities so that they might know life, says Jesus, even resurrected life. We may not have the power to heal those with disabilities, but we do have the power to come alongside them so that they are not alone. We may not be able to say, “stand up and walk,” but we can promise to stand with them, to show them what abundant life feels like. Jesus calls us to bring resurrection life here and now to those who have only been able to see resurrection as their future. God loves the world (John 3:16), you see, and God needs us to make that happen.

What does the Bible say about our Responsibility to Care for Older Adults?

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Anyone who has ever memorized or even read the Ten Commandments already knows that the Bible emphasizes the importance of providing care for older adults. The commandment *Honor your father and your mother* frames the matter rather simply (Exodus 20:12; Deuteronomy 5:16).

The simplicity and force of the commandment gets lost, however, when we turn it into a tool for teaching young children and restless teens to *obey* what their parents tell them. For one thing, the command to *honor* encompasses much more than duty or obedience. It refers to generous benevolence and esteem. It implies caretaking. Furthermore, God



addresses the commandment primarily to the adults among the ancient Hebrews. It summons the people of God to preserve the dignity and well-being of the older generations in their midst. It attempts to guarantee that even the vulnerable and infirm members of society will never suffer neglect.

But even though the economic means by which families and a society provides care to people have changed, it does not follow that the main purpose for honoring senior generations has become outdated. The Bible consistently calls for ways of living that promote life and communal flourishing. It insists that no one can truly hope to thrive unless all members of a society are given the opportunity to so, no matter who they are. When we treat some lives as less deserving of honor and care, we make it clear that our whole society is diseased.

What does the Bible Say about our Responsibility to Care For People Living in Poverty?

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Jesus cares for the poor and commands that his followers also care for the poor.

For Christians today, it is important to note that the economic and political systems in which we live today are very different from those of either the Old Testament or the New Testament. Most of us do not have farms or orchards where we can leave the last rows and the gleanings for the poor. Most do not take or give our cloaks as collateral and most do not lend money directly to the poor.

But our God is the same God. And God still demands that we care for the poor. The challenge is to keep the spirit of the biblical laws and apply them to our new economic and political systems. The challenge is to discern together how best within our own political and economic system we can care for the poor—including the orphan, the widow, the resident alien, the crippled, the lame, the blind, and the mentally ill. In order to solve that challenge, we are going to need everybody on board.



What does the Bible Say about our Responsibility to Care For Children?

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As the parents bring children to Jesus to be blessed, Jesus welcomes them all (Mark 10:13-16). He makes no distinction between children or value judgment on their potential: they are all welcomed and blessed. In bestowing the blessing and making them heirs of the Kingdom, he recognizes them as partners, even as equals. They are sent out with this blessing as messengers are sent out. We find the children again as Jesus enters Jerusalem, shortly before his trial and execution. They are shouting Hosanna! Jesus said to the angry adults, 'Yes; have you never read, [Psalm 8]: 'Out of the mouths of infants and nursing babies you have prepared praise for yourself?'" (Matthew 21:16-17).

Today, in a society that values success, which is usually defined in terms of wealth, power, and prestige, children are often over-looked. Children, many children, remain superfluous in comparison to other political, social, and economic agendas. They can be easily disregarded, quickly ignored.

Martin Luther underlines the dual nature of obedience (obedience/responsibility) in his commentary on this commandment in the *Large Catechism*: "it would also be well to preach to parents on the nature of their responsibility, how they should treat those whom they have been appointed to rule." The parental office, the rule of authorities (government, politicians), is not exercised for the simple fulfillment of "their own pleasure, amusement," and ideological fancies. They are called upon to provide an environment in which all peoples, especially children, can live, learn and thrive.

VIDEO RESOURCES

**Brief Infographic from The Henry J. Kaiser Family Foundation on
Block Grant or Per Capita Cap**

<http://kff.org>

The Faces of Medicaid - Video Montage

<https://lssmn.wistia.com/medias/yqeit4gv1v>