



Belonging and becoming:

A disability inclusion devotional

Vision

Wherever there is hardship or injustice Salvos will live, love and fight alongside others to transform Australia one life at a time, with the love of Jesus.

Mission

The Salvation Army Australia is a Christian movement dedicated to sharing the love of Jesus.

We share the love of Jesus by:

- Caring for people
- Creating faith pathways
- Building healthy communities
- Working for justice

Values

Recognising that God is already at work in the world, we value:

- Integrity
- Compassion
- Respect
- Diversity
- Collaboration

We commit ourselves in prayer and practice to this land of Australia and its people, seeking reconciliation, unity and equity.

Our commitment to inclusion

The Salvation Army Australia acknowledges the Traditional Owners of the land on which we meet and work and pay our respect to Elders past, present and future.

We value and include people of all cultures, languages, abilities, sexual orientations, gender identities, gender expressions and intersex status. We are committed to providing programs that are fully inclusive. We are committed to the safety and wellbeing of people of all ages, particularly children.





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Friends,

Some of my favourite people have children with disabilities and are children with disabilities. And, how I love it when they feel loved and included as families.

Some friends of mine went into an area and discovered many children with disabilities, so they asked God how they might contribute. They had many ideas: providing meals for families when kids were in hospital, transporting families to and from appointments, being there at important times, touching base, celebrating Christmas, and even a special wheelchair race. Whatever they could do they did do.

They found favour in the schools, and I was blown away one day when I went to a group known as 'Families in the Kitchen'. I watched as families sat together, made a simple meal, enjoyed each other, shared a simple word from the Gospel, and did life. I was moved deeply watching as a young boy took such a long time to lift his elbow and place it on the Kitchen Whiz food processor to see it spin. And then there was sheer delight that came to him and his whole family as that appliance spun. I was moved to tears. Something so beautiful, and yet shared with a 'real community'. Loving and being loved. Serving and being served. Knowing and being known. Celebrating and being celebrated.

This then led to a service, where all were welcome, all engaged in the ways that they could, and all were included and loved.

That is what we are about.

These devotions are beautiful and teach us so much about what is important.

I commend them to you and ask that you use them with others.

We are enriched when we live big lives.

How beautiful this is.

May we include, celebrate, understand, and love in very beautiful ways.

Bless you.



Miriam Gluyas, Commissioner
Territorial Leader
The Salvation Army Australia Territory

Acknowledgements

Thank you to each of the Salvos who contributed to this devotional by sharing their lived experience of disability. We are grateful for your willingness to share your reflections on the Bible and disability. May our movement use these insights to continue exploring how we can create communities where more people with disabilities experience belonging and can become more reflective of God's Kingdom on Earth as it is in Heaven.

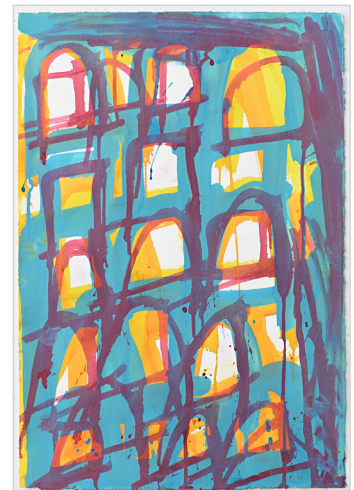
Joseph Pinkard
Disability Inclusion Lead
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Cover art

A special thanks to artist Warren O'Brien for providing the cover art for this devotional. Warren is a soldier at Box Hill Corps in Victoria.

'Warren O'Brien is a prolific painter whose abstract images echo the rhythm and repetition of his process. The layering of radiant colours creates the illusion of depth and texture in his work and his use of a repeated arc motif, seemingly based on forms found in arched windows, invites the viewer to explore the many complex layers within his works.'

(Arts Project Australia)



Untitled by Warren O'Brien 2019

A note on language

A question that often arises when exploring disability inclusion is, "What word/s should I use?"

Each of us has a different experience with the words around disability. Some of us use the words additional needs, some use special needs, some all abilities and some impairment. The most important thing to remember is that people are not defined by their disabilities, so we refrain from phrases such as 'disabled person', instead preferring 'person living with a disability' and similar phrases.

This a journey of learning for us all in times of change. If you want to use the 'most appropriate term', then continue to engage in relationship with family, parents, carers and more to see how they frame terms to see what they are comfortable with. And where necessary, respectfully ask the person.

In God's image – Genesis 1:26-28

“So God created human beings in his own image.
In the image of God he created them;
male and female he created them.”

Genesis 1:27 (NLT)

I used to read *You are Special*, by Max Lucado, to my children. This book follows the story of a wooden character called Punchinello. In Punchinello's world, stickers are used to measure worth. Stars are given to those who are seen as special. Grey dots are given to the people who are deemed of little worth. The more stars you receive the more special you are.

Sadly, Lucado's fictional world often reflects our own. While we don't use dots and stars, labels are all around us. Often, these labels are used to describe people who are different from us. People who live with a disability understand this all too well. Labels or diagnoses often mean access to necessary supports and resources. However, these labels should not define a person with a disability.

Genesis 1:26-28 reminds us that people are created in the image of God. The beauty of these few verses is that there is no asterisk attached to them. It does not say *only people who are beautiful, or *only people who are tall, or *only people who live on a certain street. Everyone is created in the image of God. You are created in the image of God!

Punchinello learns in the story that the stickers only stick when we allow them to. This is an important reminder for us. When we look at someone different from ourselves, before we reach for a label, we need to remember that the person in front of us is someone special, created in the image of God! This is the only label that should stick.



Reflect

- What are some labels you have used or heard used to describe people with disabilities?
- How might these labels be challenged and transformed when we remember that people with disabilities are created in the image of God?

Pray

Creator God, thank you for creating me in your image. Help me to see your image reflected in people who are different from me. Help me to reach out to people with acceptance and love. Amen.

Devotion by Major Catherine Spiller

Invisible disabilities – Exodus 4:6-17

We think of Moses as a child rescued from the Nile River and brought into Pharaoh's home where he became a strong leader with a compassionate heart. We know he confronted his past and journeyed into a new life where he joined a Hebrew family, marrying and beginning his own family. Moses spent these years shepherding his father-in-law's flocks as he began to figure out who he was.

Then God called him to lead his people and Moses objected.

“Moses: Please, Lord, I am not a talented speaker. I have never been good with words. I wasn't when I was younger, and I haven't gotten any better since You revealed Yourself to me. I stutter and stammer. My words get all twisted.”

Exodus 4:10 (VOICE)

Moses had already experienced the miracle of God's power. He was encountering God in a burning bush. He witnessed God's power when his staff turned into a snake and back into a stick. He felt God's power of healing when his hand became sickly then was restored to health. Yet he could not get past his speech impediment when God called him to confront Pharaoh and lead God's people to a promised land. God provided the resources Moses needed to succeed.

Disability is not always evident. We all have secrets that we keep private, or perhaps, share confidentially with a few others. We do so to protect ourselves from shame, ridicule, humiliation or discrimination. As a child, I realised I had a stammer. On occasion I was laughed at and made fun of. I was the kid at school who never answered a question in class, just in case I stumbled. I was withdrawn in public, to maintain my dignity and protect my self-esteem. Yet God called me to lead his people, to regularly preach, even with a stammer.

God provided for me in my early years with speech therapy and a developing strategy. God brought me into faith families and faith communities that supported me, loved me, and encouraged me to be who I am, my true self.



Reflect

- Why do you think there is increased stigma around 'invisible' disabilities?
- How could you positively respond when someone shares with you that they live with a disability?

Pray

Lord God, you called Aaron to be a voice for Moses. Aaron was delighted to help and serve him. Help us to be allies of people with disabilities like Aaron was for Moses.

Devotion by Major Michael Wright

Stumbling blocks – Leviticus 19:14

"You shall not curse the deaf or put a stumbling block before the blind, but you shall fear your God: I am the Lord."

Leviticus 19:14 (ESV)

To put something in the way of a person who is blind, so they trip over, seems like a cruel thing to do. Making fun of someone who cannot hear, speaking poorly about someone who cannot understand, or even doubting whether that person should have been born; I think most of us would agree that we would never intentionally do these things.

In my first full time job, I participated in a mental health workshop that involved experiential learning about mental health impairments. I was asked to answer maths questions. For those who know me, I cannot do math in my head at the best of times. In this instance, I was given itchy clothing to wear, faced with a bright light, and bombarded with random thoughts by two people pretending to be an auditory hallucination.

As an interviewer asked me questions, I found it extremely hard to focus with all the sensory input. The interviewer pushed me to work at the maths problems in my head faster and faster. My eyes were watering from the light so I couldn't look at her, the clothes felt itchier and itchier as I started sweating, and ... the people chatting in my ear started suggesting the wrong answers to the questions. I felt the gaze of the observer team looking at me. I couldn't answer fast enough ... I was mortified.

In sheer frustration, I turned to one of the people talking in my ear and told them to shut up. At that moment, I reflected on my attitudes to people in the street talking to an unseen voice. Fear, uncertainty, compassion, confusion?

What I found intolerable for five minutes, many people face for years. I thought of Leviticus 19:14.

"You shall not curse the deaf or put a stumbling block before the blind, but you shall fear your God: I am the Lord."

When I sin against my neighbour, I sin against God because they have been created in God's image.



How many stumbling blocks had I placed in someone's way, when under a tight schedule? Had I pushed for an answer when someone with an intellectual disability needed time to process? How did the bright lights and loud music challenge the focus of a person with sensory issues or who was neurotypical? When had I expected the person in a Bible study to stay seated and attentive to the conversation the whole time?

Reflect

- What are our attitudes to people with disabilities that are not visible?
- What are the stumbling blocks that prevent people with different impairments from connecting with God and our corps community?

Pray

Dear God, help me to understand what stumbling blocks are in the way of this person connecting with you. Make me humble enough to recognise when I am the cause.

Devotion by Major Catherine Spencer

Fearfully and wonderfully made – Psalm 139

“For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother’s womb. I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made.”

Psalm 139:13-14 (NIV)

Psalm 139 is a powerful reminder that every person is important to God and can live in close relationship with him. The Psalmist states in the opening line that God knows them. In verse 7 they identify there is nowhere they could go where God is not present, and in verses 13-14 they acknowledge God and praise him for how they are made.

While the Psalmist is writing from their personal perspective, these words apply to people of all abilities, personalities, family backgrounds and life situations – in spite of past mistakes. God sees each of us perfectly formed in his image. God knows who we are and what we will say or do before we even think it. He is our creator, and this passage reveals his great love for every person – regardless of any flaws or faults that human eyes might perceive.

Recently, a member of our worshipping community was struggling to access the disabled toilet in our church. I tried to assist them to access the room and discovered that I also struggled to open the door. I didn’t have the additional complications of operating a wheelchair or uncooperative fingers that were struggling to grasp the handle.

While our church buildings might have ‘disabled access’, the reality is, they are not always accessible. Challenges may stand in the way of people accessing our buildings, but nothing can stand in the way of our access to God. He is accessible to all people at all times.

Humans sometimes make assumptions about other people’s abilities based only on what they can see. But God sees and knows us far more intimately and his love goes beyond what our eyes want to see. His love opens the door for every one of us to live in relationship with him.



Reflect

- How does it feel to think of yourself as ‘fearfully and wonderfully made’?
- While we often think about ‘disabled access’ in terms of physical buildings, what else might it mean for your mission expression to be accessible to all people?

Pray

Lord God, as we engage with people of all abilities, may we see them through the lens of this Psalm – see them as God created them – fearfully and wonderfully made, precious children of the Kingdom who have been blessed by the Creator’s hand.

Devotion by Captain Annita Allman

The banquet – Luke 14:15-24

“Go out quickly into the streets and alleys of the town and bring in the poor, the crippled, the blind and the lame.”

Luke 14:21b (NIV)

If you could eat a meal anywhere in the world, where would it be?
Who would you take?

In 1975, an American man had this choice after he won a competition. He chose to fly to France to dine with a friend at a restaurant in Paris. For five hours, they ate their way through a 31-course dinner valued at \$4000. When news of this extravagant meal was reported in the newspapers, many people were upset that this could occur in a world where there was such poverty and famine. The Pope condemned the meal as ‘scandalous’. While this was controversial at the time, one wonders if lavish meals such as this might be considered more acceptable today.

Luke 14 tells the story of another Great Banquet. Through this parable, Jesus encourages us to invite people from the margins of society, including people with disabilities, to share in our lives and at our table. This is not just about meeting a person’s need for food and relationship, it is about sharing the Kingdom of God with all people – and it has eternal significance.

Jesus, observing the self-important behaviour of the religious leaders, shared a story. Jesus explained that the host of a great banquet was having trouble finding guests. Each one made up an excuse to stay away. One person had just bought a field, while another some livestock, and another was newly married. In a moment of desperation, as his plans for the banquet were faltering, the host ordered his servant to go out into the streets and alleys of the town and invite “the poor, the crippled, the blind, the lame”.

The language of verse 21 is jarring by today’s understanding and standards for describing disabilities, but the directive is clear as the phrase is repeated earlier in Luke 14:13. There is room for people with disabilities at God’s table and we are called to go out and invite them in to share in the banquet together.



Reflect

- Who have you made room for at your table? What were the challenges and blessings of doing this?
- In what ways can providing hospitality lead to a meaningful encounter with God?

Pray

Creator God, give us the courage to go out and invite people with disabilities in to share in your banquet. May this invitation provide an opportunity for us together to experience your Kingdom on Earth as it is in Heaven.

Devotion by Joseph Pinkard

Discovering disability – John 9

“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.’”

John 9:2-3 (NIV)

It’s in our human nature to search for the ‘why’ amid confusion. We scramble to find reason or cause when we see, feel or experience something that doesn’t fit in with our norm. This is no different for us as a church.

There was a time in our church life when we were confused by a child who didn’t seem to listen, couldn’t sit still or was so still it was like he wasn’t there. This was my own son. He would escape, hide, recoil at touch, be silent for hours or extraordinarily loud. He hated the shower, loved the bath, but screamed in fear of pools. He loved blowing out other people’s candles but shrieked when we sang Happy Birthday to him. While we were asking ourselves what we were doing wrong, so were some of the people in our lives.

John 9:2 can be painful for a parent navigating the world of a special needs child. Sadly, that kind of pain can also be inflicted through well-meaning comments. “What did you do in a past life?”; “Boys are different”; “He just needs some discipline”; “It’s OK to say no”; “He’s not as bad as they make out.”

Verse 3 brings such hope! It challenges us not to see a neurodiverse child as someone to be ‘managed’. It calls us to see the grace, mercy and justice of God played out through the eyes of someone who doesn’t understand what many of us take as instinctive in our faith practice.



Reflect

- What words might you use to support a parent or caregiver who appears to be struggling?
- How might you make space in your faith fellowship for people who experience pain or fear as a result of things like loud music, clapping, balloons or Happy Birthday?

Pray

Loving God, help us to come alongside parents of children with disabilities in supportive ways. May we find ways together to adapt our ministries to accommodate the sometimes-disruptive behaviours that can come with a disability. May everyone experience welcome and belonging in our mission expressions.

Devotion by Captain Penny Cooper

The body – 1 Corinthians 12:12-27

“But in fact God has placed the parts in the body, every one of them, just as he wanted them to be. If they were all one part, where would the body be? As it is, there are many parts, but one body.”

1 Corinthians 12:18-20 (NIV)

In this passage, the Apostle Paul uses the metaphor of the body to explain the mystery of the Church to the believers in Corinth. Paul illustrates that every believer has a place in the mystery of the Church and that every believer brings something unique to it.

I grew up spending time with my aunt, a person with autism and a profound intellectual disability. As a result, disability was a normalised part of my childhood. Whenever the family got together my aunt was part of our gatherings: the joyful ones, the sad ones and the mundane ones. Her presence at these events was expected and they would have been lacking without her.

In 1 Corinthians 12:18-20, Paul describes the Church as a body, with each part playing a God-ordained role. Each believer also has a purpose, a role to play in the local community of faith. If one member is excluded, the whole community will be lacking something.

Jules was a member of the corps at my first appointment as a Salvation Army officer. Jules had a significant intellectual impairment and would come to church most Sundays with her carer. She was the most enthusiastic, exuberant worshipper in the entire congregation. Jules possessed a beautiful, innocent joy in the Lord.

One Sunday, Jules walked up the front and motioned for the microphone. I happily obliged and allowed Jules to lead us all in worship. In that moment we all had a glimpse of the Kingdom of God as her joy spread throughout the congregation.



Reflect

- What are we missing out on as communities of faith when we fail to acknowledge what a member has to offer?
- Are there times when we value 'perfection of performance' over the purposes of God in that moment?

Pray

Father, helps us to see all our fellow believers as vital members of the Body of Christ. Empower us, by your Holy Spirit, to examine our hearts for ableism, both overt and hidden, and to be willing to work to see the mutual flourishing of our local community of faith, by honouring the purposes of all its parts.

Devotion by Captain Anthony Hunt



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Disability inclusion resources and support

Find more disability inclusion resources and videos at the mySalvos Intercultural and Disability Inclusion Toolkit, my.salvos.org.au/intercultural-and-disability-inclusion-team/

Does your corps need support with disability inclusion?

The Salvation Army Australia Intercultural and Disability Inclusion Team provide territorial support through training and coaching.

Email your enquiry to disabilityinclusion@salvationarmy.org.au