

Disability and Etiquette / God's Healing

Carol: Close your eyes. Right where you are, stop. Now imagine this is all you can see every single day. Darkness. Or the next time you are eating a meal or doing a job with your hands, try to imagine what you would do if you did not have complete use of your hands or were unable to feed yourself. . . waiting patiently for someone to take the fork and put the food into your mouth. . .then raise a cup to your lips for a drink. Some people live this way every single day of their lives.

Tammy: Hello, Carol. Welcome you to Women of Hope. It's so good to be together again. So, I just did what you suggested, Carol. I sat here with my eyes closed and listened to you. It was hard for me to imagine.

Carol: I know Tammy, for those of us that have the ability to see or move freely, it is almost impossible for us to imagine a handicap where we are unable to see or speak clearly or feed ourselves.

Tammy: And yet, there are people all over the world that live with these challenges and others, every single day.

Carol: Today, we want to try and think through how we react to or avoid people that might have a handicap that we cannot relate to.

Tammy: We have all done this. Someone is coming directly toward us or we enter a room and there is someone there that is different – they have some disability they are challenged with – and we feel awkward. We don't know if we should look the other way, if we should talk to them . . . Our minds don't work as quickly and it is because we somehow think that this person has to be handled differently.

Carol: That's right Tammy.... You know, people with disabilities are just ordinary people. They have abilities and weaknesses, just like everyone else does. The main thing is to just treat them the same way you would treat anybody else. Treat them as you would like to be treated yourself. It's not complicated, and you don't need special training to relate to people with disabilities.'

Tammy: You may recall Carol's friend with Cerebral Palsy. Stevie has shared with us on several occasions about her own disability and how she copes every day.

Carol: Stevie is in a wheelchair and some people are not sure what they should do or say when they meet someone with a disability, like Stevie. And some people assume things about her that are not true. So today, we want to help each other become more at ease around these very special people . . . people with disabilities.

Tammy: You know, everyone who has a disability is different. So some people might not agree with everything that we say today. And some things that are polite in *our* culture may not be polite in *your* culture. But we'll give you some ideas to start with.

Carol: When you first encounter someone with a disability, try not to let that disability confuse you. Greet them the same as you would greet anyone else. Be polite, but be yourself. Be friendly.

Tammy: Some people make the mistake of talking to someone with a disability as if they were a child. You can probably guess that they don't like that! Just because they have an outward disability does not mean that their mind is any different. You should treat people with disabilities the same way that you would treat anybody else the same age.

Carol: That means you don't have to talk slower, or louder. It's different if you're speaking to someone who has difficulty hearing. But even then – don't shout, just make sure you speak clearly, And make sure they can see your face. It's much easier for them to know what you're saying when they can watch your mouth move as you talk.

Tammy: And I have noticed that, Sometimes, instead of speaking directly to the person with a disability, people will talk to people who are with them, and may even ask questions about the disabled person . . .or they talk about the disabled person amongst themselves . How do you think that makes that person feel? How would you feel if people in a group were talking about you or asking questions about you to others right in front of you?

Carol: This is sooo important. If you want to know something about a person with a disability, or what they would like, ask them...not somebody else. And don't make comments about them as if they can't hear or understand what you're saying. You wouldn't talk about other people like that would you?

Tammy: I am afraid we all do this. But I believe it's because we are afraid. We don't want to offend or hurt anyone, so we become overly careful in what we do or say. But by not acknowledging that person as a whole person, we do offend them. So, don't be afraid.

Carol: If the disabled person has a difficulty speaking or is a bit hard to understand, listen carefully and give them time to express themselves. If you don't understand what they say, ask them to tell you again. It shows that you are both interested in what they say and care about them as a person.

Tammy: And if the person is in a wheelchair, sit down to talk with them, or kneel by them to talk so that they don't have to always look up. Bring your face down to their level so you can speak eye to eye. I once had a school teacher tell me this about my children as well. Come down to their level and talk. It creates a feeling of friendship and interest and care.

Carol: If the disabled person has difficulty with their hands or doing something, don't assume you should step in and do it for them. Ask them if they would like some help. They will be honest with you and whether they accept your help or not – they will appreciate the respect you showed to them simply by asking.

Tammy: I think that it is very important that we focus on the person and not the disability.

Carol: Tammy, that's exactly it. That's what we are trying to tell people. If we focus on the disability, we will be uncomfortable because we won't be sure of what to do or say.

Tammy: But if you focus on the person with the disability, we can be ourselves. And you never know what that might lead to – perhaps a really close friendship.

We've been talking today about how to treat people with disabilities respectfully. Here on Women on Hope we're always talking about the *one true God* who is good and loving, aren't we? You might wonder why God lets things like disability and sickness happen in the world. Or why God doesn't heal everyone. Maybe you've asked God to heal you, or someone you care about...maybe you've been asking for a long time now...and nothing's changed.

Carol: It's a hard question. I'm sure many, many people have wondered about it. It's hard because sometimes we just don't understand God's plans. And it's hard because some people are suffering a lot from a sickness or a disability. We don't have all the answers, but let's talk about what we *do* know about God and what he wants for our lives.

We know that God *has a special plan and a purpose for everyone*. His word says: 'I know the plans I have for you – plans to make you prosper, not to harm you.' (Jeremiah 29:11) We don't always

understand what God is doing, or why he lets certain hard things happen in our lives, but we know that he has a good plan.

Tammy: We know that God *loves each one of us* so much more than we can truly understand. He's *compassionate*...caring for us and what we're going through. And he's *good*...always good...in every way. God's word, the Bible says that he is 'the God of compassion and mercy, he is slow to get angry and is filled with unfailing love and faithfulness.' (Exodus 34:6)

Carol: We also know that God *hears us when we pray to him*...listening closely and carefully. God's Word says: 'You, Lord, hear the cries of those who are distressed; you encourage them, and you listen to their cry.' (Psalm 10:17)

Tammy: *We can always pray to God, and ask him for help and healing.* He never gets tired of us praying to him about something. He loves us, and he understands our hearts, our feelings and our desires. He knows his good plan for us. Sometimes he heals people when they ask for it, and sometimes he doesn't heal people for a while. Sometimes people live with disability or sickness for the rest of their lives.

So, how can God's plan be good if he doesn't heal sickness and disabilities right away?

Well...like we said before, we don't have all the answers, but God works in wonderful ways. He can take something that's hard, or bad, and make something good out of it. God's Word, the Bible says: 'And we know that God causes everything to work together for the good of those who love God...' (Romans 8:28 NLT)

Carol: Do you have any ideas about what good things God can bring out of sickness or disability?

My friend Stevie, who has Cerebral Palsy, wrote down some thoughts about her life, living with a disability, for us. This is what she said...

'There certainly are hard things about living with a disability, but God has blessed me *through* my disability in so many ways...and he's blessed others through it too! It takes me longer to do everything, so God has used that to teach me to be patient and to keep going even when things are hard. I have to trust God...rely on him to comfort me. And I get tired easily, so I need to rest a lot, which means I rely on God to keep me company too – he's always with me. So my struggles bring me closer to God – and he's the best one to get close to! And because I have struggles in my life, I can understand and comfort others better. I can encourage those who also struggle. I can speak up for others with disabilities, which is what I do for work.'

Tammy: God cares about our *health*...but he also cares about our *relationship* with him, and with others. He cares about our minds, and our *character*, what sort of people we are. He cares about our *families and communities* and people who are *disadvantaged or abused*. All these areas of life are not perfect. They are broken...and so they need healing too. Remember God's word says, "God causes *everything* to work together for the good of those who love God". Sometimes he uses hard things in our lives to make other areas of our lives better...to heal them...and even to bless others.

Carol: When you've been asking God for healing for a while, and he hasn't healed you yet, you may start to have doubts. You may wonder if God has abandoned you or he isn't pleased with you, or you haven't got enough faith in him.

God's Word, the Bible, tells us the true story of a man named Paul, who believed in Jesus, God's son. Jesus came to live on the earth as a man. He lived a perfect life...never doing anything wrong, but he chose to die on a cross to take the punishment that we all deserve for all the wrong things that we've done. He did that so that God wouldn't have to punish us, but he could forgive us, and have a relationship with us. So Paul travelled to many cities to tell people that Jesus died for them, so they

could be forgiven and have a relationship with God that lasts forever. Paul must have had so much faith in Jesus, to give up his life to travel around telling others about him.

Tammy: But the Bible says that Paul was given a ‘thorn in his flesh’...some sort of problem or disability. Now, we don’t know what that was...some people think he might have had a problem with his eyes. But Paul begged God to take it away from him. He begged three times! But God didn’t take it away. Instead God said to Paul, “My grace, my kindness, is all you need. My power works best when you are weak.” (2 Corinthians 12:9)

So God didn’t heal Paul, but he gave Paul the ability to live with his physical disability. Was that because Paul did not have enough faith? Certainly not! Look at what he gave up for Jesus, God’s son! Had God abandoned Paul? No! He gave Paul what he needed. In fact, in another part of the Bible, God promises us that he will never abandon us. (Hebrews 13:5)

Paul actually said, “I have learned how to be content with whatever I have,” (Philippians 4:11 NLT) because he knew that God worked through his disability. He said, “So now I am glad to boast about being weak, so that the power of Christ can work through me.” (2 Corinthians 12:9 NLT)

Carol: I want to tell you something that Stevie wanted me to share... she said,

‘Just like Paul was content to live with *his* disability, I’m content to live with *my* disability, because God works through it to bless me...and others. I don’t ask God to heal my disability, although I know that he *could* and he would if he wanted to. Some people with disabilities are asking God to heal them, while others are not. So you can’t assume that a person with a disability wants you to pray for their healing.

So if we want God to heal us how should we pray?

Well we can ask God to heal us, and we can always be honest with him about how we feel. If you’re frustrated, or tired of living with a sickness or a disability, or you just don’t understand what God is doing, you can tell him that. He understands your feelings. You can also trust him to do what’s best for you. If you do trust him you can ask him for healing, but above all, ask him to do whatever good he wants to do in your life. Remember, he has a very good plan for you.’

Tammy: Carol, thanks for sharing Stevie’s words with us today. Now it’s time for us to go. But here’s one last thought... God’s word tells us that if we follow Jesus, one day we will all be with him in heaven. In heaven, every area of our lives will be healed, and there will be no more death or sorrow or crying or pain (Revelation 21:4 NLT).

Carol: We would love you to tell us your story – you can contact us in care of this station or at Women of Hope.... The address: Hannah@twr.org. That’s Hannah@twr.org.

Tammy: If you have missed a program or would even like to hear one again you can do that on our website projecthannah.org that’s projecthannah.org. or by visiting us on our Facebook page. You can even “download the free iPhone or Android app “Project Hannah”

Carol: We do hope you will be with us again. Goodbye for now, and God bless you and help you to trust him with whatever his plans are for your life.