



Disability Ministry in Asia Series

Enabling Communities

Bible Studies on Including People with Disabilities in Church

FACILITATOR'S GUIDE

By Leow Wen Pin & Joanna Ong

DISABILITY MINISTRY IN ASIA
VOLUME 2

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ENABLING COMMUNITIES

Bible Studies on Including People with Disabilities in Church *Facilitator's Guide*

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*Dedicated to the memory of
Brother Lim Zhu Yen*

*Blindness didn't stop you
from helping us to see Jesus*

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INTRODUCTION

Welcome to *Enabling Communities: Bible Studies on Including People with Disabilities in Church!* Many churches in Singapore have requested from us a way to engage their small-group ministries by reflecting upon the inclusion of people with disabilities from a biblical perspective. In response to this demand, this set of Bible studies was designed with the desire to encourage a heart of inclusion in every believer by understanding God's heart for the Church and people with disabilities through the study of Scripture. In addition, we also hope that this series will enable small groups to take committed steps of faith and action to engage with people with disabilities and, further, to welcome and include them in their small groups.

So, why inclusion? According to one estimate, about one out of every 14 people in Singapore have some form of disability. This implies that we should have (on average) one person with a disability in every small group, if our churches were demographically representative of Singapore. Moreover, the number of people with disabilities in Singapore will continue to increase, with the chief driving factor being an ageing population. Thus, disability is going to be a progressively salient reality for churches; it is not a concern that will disappear if one simply ignores it.

But even more importantly, we include because God first included us upon the cross. The message of the gospel of Jesus Christ is, at its heart, fundamentally about God's choice to include a rebellious humanity in his salvation plan. Moreover, God's special heart for marginalised communities sings out repeatedly from the pages of Scripture. Therefore, the Church is called to follow after him by echoing his inclusive heart in our communities.

This set of small-group Bible studies focuses on different themes concerning disability from the New Testament. The translation used in the studies is based on the *Easy-Read Version* (ERV), but with minor adaptations by the authors to highlight the underlying Greek more clearly. The ERV was a revision of an earlier translation known as the *English Version for the Deaf*, a translation created to meet the needs of the Deaf community. The ERV continues that original legacy through its use of simpler vocabulary and shorter sentences, and is more accessible for those with intellectual disabilities and for those with limited English.

How To Use This Study

Each of the four studies in this book is divided into the following sections:

- **Looking Ahead:** This section gives you an overview of the whole study in a few main points.
- **Opening Prayer/Worship Song:** This section aims to help you focus and open your hearts to God's Word.
- **Warm Up:** Instead of diving straight into the study, a preparatory activity is provided to help the group warm up. The focus of the activity is linked to the particular themes of the study and gives an added dimension to the discussion later on.
- **Study the Word:** This section is divided into *Explore* and *Apply* sections. Exploration questions help you to understand the text deeper in the context of disability while application questions help you to live out the text in your own context. Key learning points are provided to sum up the truths learnt.
- **Commit to Action:** Put what you have learnt into action as a group. You are strongly encouraged to embark on this hands-on journey of knowing, welcoming, and including people with disabilities into your midst. This section suggests activities that you can do as a group. Discuss its feasibility and how you can tailor it so that all group members can be involved.
- **Wrap Up/Closing Prayer:** Use the prompts given in this section to reflect on the main takeaways of the study, ask God to renew your hearts, and commit your plans of action to Him.
- **Going Further After the Study:** For members of the group who wish to take a step further, embedded within this section are video clips and articles for further reflection after the study. You can scan the QR code to access these. You might wish to share your reflections with your small group.

Student's Guide

There is a companion Student's Guide of this booklet that should be given to each of the small group members who are participating in this Bible study series.

GUIDANCE FOR FACILITATORS

Introduction

In this Facilitator's Guide, detailed facilitation guidance is provided for each study. Since each study comprises several different sections, the rationale or goal of each section is clearly explained. Answers are provided for each question. Moreover, guiding questions or prompts are provided to help the facilitator lead the discussion in the small group, while moving the study along at a good pace. Before each study, facilitators are encouraged to work through the study themselves, to read through the guidance provided in detail, and to plan how to lead the study.

Tips for Facilitators

Here are some best practices that facilitators may wish to consider:

1. ***Involve multiple people in leading different parts of the study.*** Consider asking one member to read out loud the learning objectives under the *Looking Ahead* section; ask another member to lead the prayer, and another to lead the worship song. However, due to the detailed preparation required, it is not recommended that facilitators delegate the *Warm Up*, *Study the Word*, and *Commit to Action* sections to others.
2. ***Ask questions.*** Each study is designed for facilitators to elicit answers from their group members. Facilitators should avoid answering the questions themselves. Instead, they should give their members time to think about the questions and give thoughtful answers. Use the guiding questions to help members if the questions seem too difficult. Then consolidate their answers and help to direct the conversation forward.
3. ***Be practical.*** There is a tendency for Bible study sessions to get bogged down in technical minutiae or mere "head knowledge", without sufficient emphasis on transformed living. Remember that the goal of all Bible study is fruitfulness (see Mark 4:20); in contrast, knowledge often merely puffs up (see 1 Corinthians 8:1). Make sure you spend sufficient time helping your members move towards concrete application in the *Apply* and *Commit to Action* sections.

4. ***Emphasise the Group.*** There is a tendency for Christians of our day to be individualistic about their faith. However, inclusion is a communal issue, and cannot be practised in isolation. Moreover, group study of Scripture has the benefit of mutual encouragement, inspiration, and accountability. So, as a facilitator, make sure that your members think about living out the text as a group, and not merely individually.

5. ***Time Management.*** One of the key skills in ensuring an enjoyable and meaningful Bible study session is time management. This ensures that the discussion moves along at a good pace while providing enough time for Bible study members to reflect on the questions. A suggested schedule is provided below to help facilitators manage their time well according to a 1.5-hour schedule:

Segment	Purpose	Time
Looking Ahead	Summary of what they will learn	1 min
Opening Prayer & Worship	Open up the time in prayer and help them to focus on God	10 mins
Warm Up	An introductory activity to focus attention	10 mins
Study the Word	The study proper: Section 1 — approx. 2 mins of reading Sections 2, 3 & 4 — approx. 8 mins each question	55 mins
Commit to Action	A time for the group to commit to action together (make sure you set aside time for this; a Bible study without changed lives is meaningless)	10 mins
Wrap Up & Closing Prayer	Summary of learning points and corporate prayer	4 mins
Going Further After the Study	Share a few ways for interested members to go further	—
TOTAL		90 mins

6. *Be Prayerful.* Last, we encourage you, as the facilitator, to be prayerful for your group. Sometimes, Bible study can be frustrating, especially when our group members do not seem to “get it”. However, remember that changing hearts, heads, and hands is the work of the Spirit. So, be prayerful in inviting the Spirit to do his work among your small-group members. Invite him to transform your own heart as well.

Thank you so much for facilitating this Bible study series with your small group. We thank you for your willingness to serve, and we pray that this Facilitator’s Guide enables you to lead meaningful and enjoyable studies.

DISABILITY IS SOCIAL

Luke 5:12–14

Looking Ahead

You'll discover that:

- disability is social as well as physical;
- our practices can disable other people; and
- churches can participate in a form of healing by including people with disabilities.

For the Facilitator: These are the key learning points that your group members should grasp after the session is completed.

Opening Prayer

Dear Father, we thank you for our church community and for giving us the desire to know and include people with special needs. Grant us the right understanding and open hearts as we study your Word. Touch us with your love, that we may faithfully live out your mission for us. In Jesus' name we pray, amen.

Worship Song

“Streets of the City” by Stuart Townend

For the Facilitator: This song helpfully reminds the group that Jesus is our God who will “stand with the weak and the needy”. This, of course, includes people with disabilities. It is therefore our responsibility to be Jesus’ “hands” and “voice”, and to “see with the eyes of the Saviour”.

Warm Up

Imagine you were in a world where everyone was a wheelchair user except you. How would the world be different, and how would you experience school or work? Discuss.

For the Facilitator: The goal of this thought experiment is to highlight to the group that *one can experience disability even when one is not physically or mentally impaired*. We should recognise that our environment and practices can disable others.

If the group has difficulty thinking of how the world would be different, you can prompt them with the following possible answers:

1. ***Alienation***. You would feel like the odd one out as everyone is lower and you stand taller. You would feel strange and out of place.
2. ***The environment becomes less friendly and more dangerous***. When you walk into a room through a doorway, you must bend down. Since everyone on wheelchairs would be closer to the ground, doorways would be lower. If you were not careful, you might hit your head.
3. ***Lack of access***. When you go to work or school, there would be no place to sit. Everyone would have their own chair.
4. ***Lack of empathy***. When you complain about all of this, some of them might say, “Get a wheelchair, then there would be no problem”.

Help the group recognise that all the examples above are actually things that people with disabilities experience every day when they live in “our world”.

Study the Word

1. Read Luke 5:12–14¹

¹² One time Jesus was in a town where a very sick man lived. This man was covered with leprosy. When the man saw Jesus, he bowed before Jesus and begged him, “Lord, you can make me clean if you want.” ¹³ Jesus said, “I do! Be clean!” Then he touched the man, and immediately the leprosy was gone. ¹⁴ Then Jesus said, “Don’t tell anyone about what happened. But go and let the priest look at you. And offer a gift to God for your cleansing as Moses commanded. This will show people that you are clean.”

2. Focus on Luke 5:12

Explore

- a. In biblical times, according to Leviticus 13:45–46 and Numbers 5:1–4, how would a person with leprosy be treated? (Note: What is called leprosy today [i.e., Hansen’s Disease] is not the same as what is called leprosy in the Bible. Leprosy in the Bible comprises a wide range of skin conditions, including those that are not contagious.)

1. ERV with modifications.

For the Facilitator: The goal of this question is to *highlight the social treatment of persons with leprosy*. According to the biblical text, lepers are to be isolated and alienated away from other people through (1) wearing torn clothes; (2) letting their hair hang loose; (3) crying out “unclean”; and (4) staying outside the camp. All this signals very clearly to people around them that lepers are to be alienated.

As the note in question 2a highlights, biblical leprosy is not the same as modern-day leprosy, and included diseases that were not contagious, including rashes and skin discolouration. Thus, there was *not* always a medically-necessary reason to alienate lepers during biblical times. Rather, the laws in Leviticus and Numbers are very much religious (and social) in orientation. This is why the leper in Luke 5:12–14 does not ask to be healed (Greek *therapeuō*) but to be cleansed (Greek *katharizō*).

- b. Imagine you were the person with leprosy. What would be more disabling to you: your physical condition or your social experience? Why?

For the Facilitator: Given that biblical leprosy was probably not modern-day leprosy but included milder skin conditions, the goal of this question is to *highlight that the leper’s social alienation would likely be much more disabling than his or her physical condition*.

Try to get your group members to go beyond the answers given in the previous question. You may wish to use the following guiding questions: (i) How would a leper feel? (ii) Do you think lepers can interact with their friends and families? (iii) How does this compare to your experiences of quarantine during a pandemic?

*Main
Point 1*

Disability is a _____ condition, and our practices
can _____ other people.

For the Facilitator: Disability is a social condition, and our practices can disable other people.

Note: Does the discussion seem to suggest there is something wrong with the laws in Leviticus and Numbers? Well, it is important to remember that Old Testament law was an intermediate point in God's process of revelation and was subject to further refinement. For example, Jesus himself pointed out in Matthew 19:7–9 that Deuteronomy 24:1–4 is not the moral ideal since divorce is not the ideal. Likewise, Luke 5:12–14 points towards an ideal where persons with leprosy are not excluded.

For the Facilitator: It is a common interpretive error to assume that the laws in the Old Testament are timelessly perfect as they stand. As highlighted in the note above, even Jesus notes that (at least) some of the laws of Moses were not ideal as they were given to imperfect humanity. Hence, it is biblically sound to point out that the New Testament provides a more ideal vision of inclusion than Leviticus or Numbers.

Apply

- c. Have you been isolated or rejected because you were different in some way? How did you feel? What helped you cope and overcome?

For the Facilitator: The goal of this question is *to allow members to recall and share the pain of being rejected and how God has helped them* in order to build empathy. You might wish to use the following guiding questions to elicit sharing from your group: (i) Was there a time you felt alone due to certain beliefs or physical conditions in your workplace or school? (ii) Who or what helped you to overcome? (iii) How can you extend that help to others facing the same issue?

- d. Since disability can be a product of our culture and practices, have you disabled others with your words and actions? Check your heart and seek God for forgiveness.

For the Facilitator: The goal of this question is to encourage *your members to confess to one another and lead them into a prayer seeking forgiveness*. You may wish to use the following guiding questions: (i) What are some wrong assumptions and perspectives that we have concerning persons with disabilities? (ii) Have you known anyone with disabilities in your life? How did you treat them?

3. Focus on Luke 5:13–14

Explore

- a. Jesus does not need to heal people by touching them (see Matthew 8:5–10), and usually he does not. Why do you think he touched the leper in this case, going against Old Testament law (see Leviticus 5:2–3)?

For the Facilitator: The goal of this question is to *highlight that Jesus chose a way of cleansing that was restorative of the leper*, while also demonstrating his identity as the Holy One of Israel.

Compare Jesus' cleansing in this narrative where he touches the leper with the many other ways by which he heals people: Matthew 8:5–13 (paralysis—word), 28–32 (demon-possessed—word), 9:1–8 (paralysed—word), 17:14–18 (demon-possessed—word); Mark 3:1–5 (shrivelled hand—word), 7:31–35 (deaf and mute—touched ear, spit, and touched tongue, word), 8:22–26 (blind—spit and touched eyes); Luke 17:11–19 (leprosy—word); John 4:46–53 (dying—word).

By touching the leper, Jesus does two things: (1) he highlights his identity as the Holy One of Israel since it is only the God of Holiness who can make the unclean clean; (2) he provides the leper with something that the leper would not have had for a long time—a warm human touch.

- b. Why does Jesus command the cleansed man to “go and let the priest look at you” (Leviticus 14:1–8)? What outcome does that achieve?

For the Facilitator: The goal of this question is to remind the group that restoration for persons with disabilities *does not only consist of physical healing but also social restoration*. By asking the man to present himself in this way, the man is restored to full social and religious fellowship, thus allowing his healing to be complete. The cleansing that Jesus provides is not just physical, but involves the restoration of wholeness (see Luke 4:18–19).

This has profound implications: For God does not always choose to heal a person who is disabled, but *the Church can always choose to extend social inclusion to those who are disabled*. In this way, the Church can always be a healing community even without physical healing.

Main
Point 2

Disability is transformed by _____.

For the Facilitator: Disability is transformed by inclusion.

Apply

- c. Jesus extended an inclusive touch to the leper. What are some concrete ways that we can do so as well? What would be a good starting point?

For the Facilitator: The goal of this question is to lead your group to *brainstorm practical ways of inclusion in your community*. Some guiding questions that you can use: (i) What does inclusion of persons with disabilities mean to you? (ii) How could you participate in inclusion after this study? It could be making friends and getting to know someone or family members of persons with disabilities in your church or neighbourhood. It is not only about special training but simply a willingness to extend love, warmth, and welcome to people with special needs. Encourage your group to articulate what inclusion means for each of them.

Commit to Action

In small groups, make friends with a person with a disability or family member of persons with disabilities in church. Seek to understand them, finding out how they feel being in church and what their needs are at the current moment. Pray for them if they allow. If you cannot find any in your church, look around the community, a nearby disability organisation, or contact the Koinonia Inclusion Network (www.kin.org.sg) for more insights on disability awareness.

For the Facilitator: This is the most important segment in the study. The goal of this segment is not only to get your members to *live differently* in light of the Bible's teachings, but also to help them to do so *together* as one people of God. Be sure to brainstorm for a specific group effort that you can undertake as a small group.

Wrap Up

Let us witness to Jesus by giving an inclusive touch to those with special needs. While people can disable people, the opposite is also true: the Church can enable people through Jesus' inclusive touch.

Closing Prayer

Father, thank you that we have one another to study your Word. Give us the willingness to welcome others into your family as well. Help us be a testimony to people with disabilities and enable them through your inclusive touch. In Jesus' name we pray, amen.

Going Further After the Study

Challenge

As you view the following video and article, consider this question: In what ways can churches change their culture and practices to become more inclusive of persons with disabilities?

Watch

Video: “To really accept and show understanding”

<https://bit.ly/enablingcommunities1>



Read

Article: “Blind greeter, drummer with Down’s Syndrome, inspire participants at disability-inclusive course for churches”

<https://bit.ly/enablingcommunities2>



ABOUT THE AUTHORS

LEOW Wen Pin is the Director of the Centre for Disability Ministry in Asia, and Lecturer in Biblical and Interdisciplinary Studies, at the Biblical Graduate School of Theology; he also leads the Koinonia Inclusion Network. Wen Pin's research interests include disability theology and ministry, and he has published several research and popular works in these areas, including *Enabling Hearts: A Primer for Disability-Inclusive Churches*. He is an editorial board member of the *Journal of Disability and Religion*, and serves on the advisory group of the Centre for Autism and Theology (University of Aberdeen, Scotland). Wen Pin has more than a decade of experience in the disability sector, helping to pioneer several innovative institutions for persons with disabilities, and frequently preaches and teaches at churches on the topic of inclusion.

Joanna ONG Oon Jeu is the Research Coordinator of the Centre for Disability Ministry in Asia (CDMA). She supports the CDMA's Director in setting the research agenda for the CDMA as well as managing the CDMA's research projects. By God's divine appointment, her background as an experienced educator and researcher has led her down the path of disability-inclusive research for the Church. Her current research for the CDMA focuses on understanding disability ministry in Singapore, and developing a curriculum for fully-inclusive Sunday school classrooms.

ABOUT THE COVER ARTIST



*“Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding.
In all your ways acknowledge Him and He will guide your path.”*

Proverbs 3:5-6

Mr Aaron James Yap, a cheerful and friendly young man, loves to express himself through the visual arts. He has autism and so perceives the world around him in a unique way, which is reflected in the way he portrays people as animals and characters in his paintings.

Art, to him, is a form of self-expression, characterised by his whimsical and highly imaginative style. He makes extensive use of bold colours in his paintings, which is reflected in his painting on the cover of *Enabling Communities*, where Aaron’s careful eye for both light and colour draws the viewer’s attention to the cross that is at the heart of his Christian faith.

The Koinonia Inclusion Network (KIN) is pleased to appoint Aaron as KIN’s inaugural Artist-in-Residence. In this role, Aaron partners with KIN to promote the inclusion of people with special needs in churches in fulfilment of the Great Commission.



The Koinonia Inclusion Network is a Christian parachurch organisation that enables Christian communities by helping them include people with disabilities. It does so through (1) training and consulting with churches, (2) developing resources to support churches, and (3) promoting disability missions.



The Biblical Graduate School of Theology is a trans-denominational college for the whole people of God, providing flexible, relevant, and quality education that draws upon Scripture, Christian traditions, and interdisciplinary studies.



The Centre for Disability Ministry in Asia is dedicated to the mission of producing context-relevant resources to enable disability ministry in Asia. It is a collaboration between the Koinonia Inclusion Network and the Biblical Graduate School of Theology.

This is an excellent and much-needed resource for Christians to understand biblical foundations and principles on empowering and including people with disabilities in the Church. It also suggests how the Church can better integrate such people in its life and mission, thus expressing God's heart and will.

*Bishop Emeritus Dr Robert Solomon
The Methodist Church in Singapore*

Enabling Communities has been written with a profound biblical conviction that God has called the Church to model His nature by loving, embracing and displaying His beauty and brilliance through everyone He has created, including people with disabilities. May God use Wen Pin's and Joanna's excellent offering to build bridges among ourselves so that we can not only understand and reach out to people with disabilities, but also receive and embrace them as inspiration and instruments of God for our own formation as a community of Christ's disciples.

*The Venerable Wong Tak Meng
Archdeacon for Community Services, Diocese of Singapore*

As Christians, we are called to welcome widely, to include intentionally, and to love lavishly. This series of thoughtful studies encourages and equips us to ensure our families, friends, and neighbours with disabilities receive the good news of the gospel and experience the deep fellowship of community.

*Dr Erik Carter
Cornelius Vanderbilt Professor of Special Education, Vanderbilt University, USA*

Cover artist: Aaron James Yap



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