

Disability – Jesus Heals a Blind Man

Carol: It was lunchtime. Stevie was sitting with her friends on the grass in the school yard. They were laughing, and talking rather loudly ... excited about the party they were going to next week. They told each other what they were going to wear, and giggled about who they hoped would be at the party. It was a hot day, so Rose said, 'Let's go sit in the shade, under that tree behind the junior classrooms.'

Stevie sighed. She knew what was about to happen next. The girls got up and started walking, still chattering away about the party. They didn't notice the look on Stevie's face. They walked down the steps and across to the tree and sat down under it. Stevie couldn't go down the steps with her friends because she was in a wheelchair. She had to push her wheelchair all the way to the other end of the school, where there was a flat part to cross over. There, she could turn the corner, and go all the way back to where her friends were. It took her friends two minutes to get to the tree ... but it took Stevie ten minutes.

Can you imagine how much of the conversation Stevie would have missed?

Tammy: Hello ... and welcome to Women of Hope. I'm Tammy, and I'm glad to be with you today.

Carol: Hi, It's me, Carol and I was wondering how Stevie must have felt when her friends left her to wheel her wheelchair around to the other end of the school and back again. *They* were all talking happily, but how do you think *she* felt?

Tammy: I think she might have felt sad and lonely, but she may have felt angry and frustrated too. We've heard about Stevie a few times before haven't we Carol?

Carol: Yes we have! Stevie is my friend. She has a disability called Cerebral Palsy ... so her body wriggles a bit more than she can control ... but her mind works perfectly fine. The story we just heard *really* happened. And it happened *lots* of times to her when she was at school. She told me that she never really felt a real part of that group of friends at school.

Tammy: That must have been hard for her. I wonder if *you've* ever been left out, or excluded ... where you couldn't join in with something that other people were doing? And I wonder, how did you feel when that happened?

Carol: You know, people with disabilities are *often* left out, excluded from things just like Stevie was excluded from the conversation with her friends. People with disabilities can miss out on many activities. Like school, playing games, work, family events, church. A disability is any problem with a person's body, or mind... that lasts a long time... and stops them doing things that most people can easily do.

Tammy: And... going to school and work are two *really* important things to be able to do, aren't they? If you can't work you can't earn the money you need for your basic living ... like food and clothes. And it's much harder to find work if you don't get an education at school.

Carol: Stevie told me that many children with disabilities don't get the chance to go to school. She feels sad about that. She wishes every person who had a disability had the same opportunities she did ... to go to school so she could learn, and get better at the things that she *can* do. And she can do

a lot of things. Every person with a disability also has abilities – things they *can* do well! Stevie sometimes needs *my* help- and I sometimes need *her* help, to see things through the eyes of a person with different abilities. I'm sure that Stevie has helped me to value people more, just like God does.

Tammy: I wish everyone had the same opportunities too. There are many things that make it hard for people with disabilities to join in at school, at work and in other activities. We'll call these *barriers*. Can you think of any?

Carol: ... and let's also think about how we can help people with disabilities to overcome those barriers ... so they can do what they would like to do.

Tammy: There may be physical barriers in their *environment* or *where* they live that stop them doing things that seem normal to us. The roads around their house might be too rough to use a wheelchair. Maybe there are steps into their home, or local school or shop or clinic. That would really limit where they could go.

Carol: A person who has poor eyesight might have difficulty seeing things in a dark room ... or if written words are too small. And what about someone who's going deaf- it would be hard to join in a conversation while there's a lot of noise going on around them. So what do *you* think we could do about these barriers ... that stop people with disabilities joining in? What can we do to help?

Tammy: Let's think ... for a person with poor eyesight, we can make sure there is plenty of sunlight in rooms that they use. Or we can use extra lights or candles. Make sure nothing dangerous is lying around like something sharp or hot. And we should try to avoid moving furniture around ... because they remember where things are. If we move them they may trip and fall. We could read aloud to them ... or write words for them in big bold letters ... but not too big! If you can't do that, you could find someone who can. But make sure you ask what they would like you to do to help.

Carol: For people who have difficulty *hearing*, you could find a quiet place to talk together, look directly at them, and speak clearly and loudly ... but never shout!

Tammy: When an important announcement is made in your town, people with disabilities may not hear it, or see the notices. So make sure they know about it. I heard about a place where the police told everyone to move away because flood waters were coming. But a *deaf* man didn't hear the warning and he stayed in his house. When the flood swept through, they found him sitting on the roof with his umbrella!

Carol: Oh stories like that can break your heart! But **what** a good thing he was safe! So...when you hear important information, remember people with disabilities in your neighbourhood, and make sure they know about it.

Tammy: You could have a look around your local area ... the roads, and public places ... for barriers that would make it difficult for people who have trouble walking, or who can't walk at all. Talk to people in authority who might be able to fix those problems. Tell them why it's important to fix them. And maybe you could find strong people to carry a person who can't walk to where they need to go.

Carol: You know, Stevie told me that the *best* thing you can do for someone with disabilities is to just

talk to them. Ask them what *they* want to do ... and *together* find a way for them to do it. Let them make decisions about themselves.

Stevie said to me the other day, "You know, I can't do things like cook my dinner, change the sheets on my bed, or write on an important document. But I know what I like... what makes me feel comfortable. I know what food I like, and even what food is healthy for me. And I knew what course I wanted to study. So *I* know what's best for *me*, I just can't always do those things by myself. Most people with disabilities know exactly what they need and want. Some people with disabilities might need some help with making decisions, but they don't need someone to *control* them.

Tammy: We've been talking today on Women of Hope about some of the things that can make it really difficult for people with disabilities. Often they can't do the things they want to do. Especially at school and work. Now Carol is going to tell you a story from God's true Word the Bible. It's about when Jesus Christ, God's Son, met someone with a disability.

Carol: Jesus was in a town called Galilee in Israel. He had been teaching the people about himself and about his Father, God.

As Jesus was walking along, he saw a man begging, a man who had been blind all his life. 'Teacher,' his followers asked him, 'why was this man born blind? Was it because of his own sins or his parents' sins?' 'It was not because of his sins or his parents' sins,' Jesus answered. 'This happened so the power of God could be seen in his life...' Then he spat on the ground, made mud with the saliva, and spread the mud over the blind man's eyes. Jesus told him, 'Go wash yourself in the pool of Siloam.' So the man went and washed and when he came back... he could see!

His neighbours and others knew him as a blind beggar. They asked each other, 'Isn't this the man who used to sit and beg?' Some said he was, and others said, 'No, he just looks like him!' But the beggar kept saying, 'Yes, *I'm the same one!*' They asked, 'Who healed you? What happened?'

He told them, 'The man they call Jesus made mud and spread it over my eyes and told me, "Go to the pool of Siloam and wash yourself." So I went and washed, and now I can see!' (John 9:1-3, 6-11 Adapted from the New Living Translation) And that's the end of that part of the story from God's Word, the Bible.

Tammy: Wow ... I love hearing stories from the Bible. They have so much *meaning* in them don't they?

Carol: They do. In this one I am especially drawn to the part when Jesus saw the man who had been born blind and His followers asked him who had sinned –the man or his parents. They really thought that his blindness was a punishment for sin. But Jesus said... that he was *not* blind because of sin, but so that the power of God could be seen in his life.

Tammy: And God's power really was seen! He made mud with his saliva and dirt. Then he spread the mud over the eyes of the man, and told him to wash himself in the pool of Siloam.

Carol: And the man did exactly what Jesus said, and then he could see! How amazing is that? Can you imagine how amazed and joyful that man would have been? When people saw him, some of them couldn't even believe he was the same man. And the man himself – he had something to say

didn't he?

Tammy: Yes! He kept saying, 'Yes, *I'm the same one!*' So the people asked him: "What happened?" And he told the truth: He said that Jesus made mud and spread it over his eyes, and told him to wash in the pool of Siloam. And, he did that, and *now he could see!*

Carol: It's such a great story- not just because it was a miracle, but we learn something from Jesus about people with disabilities don't we?

Tammy: Yes we do! Because the *people* believed that the man's blindness was a punishment for sin, it is not difficult to imagine that they would have avoided him ... or maybe said nasty things to him. They certainly wouldn't have let him join in their activities.

Carol: But Jesus treated him differently! Jesus really *cared* for the man. He even gave the man his sight back! And he did it in an unusual way...did you notice that Jesus gave the blind man an opportunity to be part of the healing? Jesus gave him a *choice*... And the blind man *chose* to go and find the right pool and wash there. He must have believed in Jesus. He must have understood somehow that the power of God was coming to him through this kind man, Jesus.

Tammy: Can you imagine how different his life would have been after that moment? He could see now! He could see where he was going, and what he was doing. How much more would he be able to do now, that he couldn't do before?

Carol: We were talking earlier about removing things that stop people with disabilities being able to do what they want to do. Jesus certainly did that, didn't he? He removed the man's blindness!

But maybe you noticed what else Jesus removed. It was something that had really affected this man's life in a bad way...can you think what it was? ... it was what other people *believed* about him. *They* believed he was wicked, or cursed. But *Jesus* said that his blindness wasn't a sin. And it *wasn't caused by sin*. And now the man wasn't blind any more...so now people wouldn't believe that he was a 'sinner' any more. Now the man would be able to join in and do things with other people... He could now find work to earn his *own* money, so that he could look after *himself*, instead of begging for money. He could have a full life. Jesus healed his eyes, and he also healed his relationships... and gave him dignity... and independence.

Tammy: There are still many people who believe that a disability is a curse, or a punishment for sin. Maybe you've heard people say that.

But what did Jesus say?... He said that the man wasn't blind because of sin but so that God's power could be shown in him. The blind man saw God's power, and so did all the people around. They praised God and realised that Jesus was from God, because he was able to heal blindness.

Carol: You know, we can't always understand why people have disabilities but we know that God loves *everybody*. He has a good purpose for creating every person. We have different abilities and disabilities, partly so that we can live together and bless each other. People often don't understand people with disabilities ... or they don't even *think* about them. So Stevie works to help people understand and think about people with disabilities. She writes things ... and she also speaks to

groups of people to help them understand.

Stevie would love to be here to talk with us today, but she knows that you might have difficulty understanding her. Her disability sometimes makes it difficult for her to say her words clearly. So she wrote something for me to read to you. She says:

'Hello there. I was invited to go on a trip to Africa. I wanted to learn more about what life is like for people with disabilities in other parts of the world. I was really excited to be invited ... so I went! I could tell you lots of great stories about my time in Africa, but for now, I'll tell you just one. In Zambia, a country in Africa, we visited the office of an organisation that helps people with disabilities to live independently within their communities. But we had to climb up lots of stairs to get there! (Laugh) Yes, an organisation for people with disabilities was at the top of lots of stairs! That's because they didn't have enough money to buy a building that didn't have stairs. So people had to carry me up the stairs. I laughed. ... I thought that was fun and funny.

Once we were up the top, we met a young man with a crooked spine. His mother was with him. I'll call them Chipo and Subira. We all sat around in a circle, in a room that was a bit dark. We talked about what it was like to have a disability in each of our home countries.

Subira told us how some people believed bad things about her son. They said bad things about him. That he was no good. Or that he'd been punished or cursed by God. She said that it was so hard to hear those things and it hurt her heart very much. So I asked her 'How do you deal with that?' Subira said 'I take my son in my arms and confess over him!... I say out loud the truth, that Chipo is God's precious gift to me. That God created him just as he wants him to be.' I said, 'That's beautiful.' My heart was really touched by those words from Subira. Meeting her and Chipo was one of the very special moments I had in Africa.

Tammy: Maybe when *you* hear something bad said about people with disabilities you could speak out the truth too ... that they are beautiful people who are loved by God ... and they are God's *gift* to us! And my friend, remember that *you* are unique and precious as well, and that God wants to show his power in *your* life. We'll be praying for you.

Carol: I hope we can be together again soon. We'd love to hear from you too, if you'd like to contact us you can write to us in care of this station or at TWR Women of Hope.

The address: TWRWomenofHope.org. We do hope you will be with us again. Goodbye, and God bless you and give you hope for each new day.