

Scripture

Ask your pupils to read any of the following Scripture that describes an encounter between Jesus and a disabled person. We've included short summaries and contextual notes that you may find helpful to share with the class as well. To assist your discussion, we've also provided the questions below, which are included with each piece of Scripture.

It is also important to note that while these stories feature Jesus' encounters with and healing of disabled men, he certainly met with and healed many disabled women.

John 9:1-11 *Jesus heals a man blind from birth*

Jesus and his disciples encounter a man who has been blind since birth. The disciples ask if the man is blind because of his own sins or the sins of his parents. Jesus tells them that the man is not being punished with blindness because of sin and heals the man.

Equating sin with disability was a common outlook during the times of Jesus. As a result, disabled people were often pushed to the margins of society, rejected by their community and even considered to be spiritually 'unclean.' Unfortunately, we know that these ways of thinking still exist in parts of the world today.

In this encounter, Jesus does important work to break down stigma by correcting the disciples and treating the blind man with dignity and respect. He also uses the moment as an opportunity to teach about spiritual blindness. After an encounter with Jesus, we too go from blindness to sight and are transformed. Just as the community did not recognise the man who used to be blind, others will not recognize us when we are transformed by the light of Christ.

Mark 10:46-52 *Jesus heals Bartimaeus*

While in Jericho, Jesus encounters a blind man named Bartimaeus. The crowd gathered around him tries to prevent Bartimaeus from meeting with Jesus. However, Jesus calls to him directly and asks him what he wants. Bartimaeus asks to be healed and Jesus restores his sight.

Again, we can see the discriminatory attitudes towards disabled people that existed during Jesus' time on earth. The crowd tries to keep Bartimaeus on the margins, but Jesus stops and brings him to the centre of the story.

It is important to note how Jesus listens to and asks Bartimaeus what he wants. In doing so, Jesus upholds his dignity as human being and a member of the community. On very few instances does Jesus simply heal a person without being asked and he usually provides spiritual healing of some sort before he performs any type of physical healing. Jesus allows people with disabilities to come to him and to tell him what they want or need rather than deciding for them.

John 9:1-11

As he went along, he saw a man blind from birth. 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. As long as it is day, we must do the works of him who sent me. Night is coming, when no one can work. While I am in the world, I am the light of the world.'

After saying this, he spat on the ground, made some mud with the saliva, and put it on the man's eyes. 'Go,' he told him, 'wash in the Pool of Siloam' (this word means 'Sent'). So the man went and washed, and came home seeing.

His neighbours and those who had formerly seen him begging asked, 'Isn't this the same man who used to sit and beg?' Some claimed that he was.

Others said, 'No, he only looks like him.'

But he himself insisted, 'I am the man.'

'How then were your eyes opened?' they asked.

He replied, 'The man they call Jesus made some mud and put it on my eyes. He told me to go to Siloam and wash. So I went and washed, and then I could see.'

1. Describe the encounter

- a. How does Jesus react when he meets the disabled person?**
- b. How do other people react and why?**

2. What does the encounter reveal to us about how Jesus treated disabled people?

Mark 10:46-52

Then they came to Jericho. As Jesus and his disciples, together with a large crowd, were leaving the city, a blind man, Bartimaeus (which means 'son of Timaeus'), was sitting by the roadside begging. When he heard that it was Jesus of Nazareth, he began to shout, 'Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!'

Many rebuked him and told him to be quiet, but he shouted louder, 'Son of David, have mercy on me!'

Jesus stopped and said, 'Call him.'

So they called to the blind man, 'Cheer up! On your feet! He's calling you.'

Throwing his cloak aside, he jumped to his feet and came to Jesus.

'What do you want me to do for you?' Jesus asked him.

The blind man said, 'Rabbi, I want to see.'

'Go,' said Jesus, 'your faith has healed you.' Immediately he received his sight and followed Jesus along the road.

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b. How do other people react and why?

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Fratelli Tutti

Read the following excerpt taken from Pope Francis' 2020 encyclical, *Fratelli Tutti*. We recommend the questions listed below to get your discussion started.

"Many persons with disabilities "feel that they exist without belonging and without participating". Much still prevents them from being fully enfranchised. Our concern should be not only to care for them but to ensure their "active participation in the civil and ecclesial community. That is a demanding and even tiring process, yet one that will gradually contribute to the formation of consciences capable of acknowledging each individual as a unique and unrepeatable person."

...Let me repeat: we need to have "the courage to give a voice to those who are discriminated against due to their disability, because sadly, in some countries even today, people find it hard to acknowledge them as persons of equal dignity." (*Fratelli Tutti* #98)

- 1. How does the quote taken from *Fratelli Tutti* relate to the Scripture you have just read?**
- 2. How does it relate to your everyday life?**

Case Studies

Share with your class any of the following case studies, which share Gift and Malia's stories. These are also shared in the PowerPoint presentation.

We suggest using the following questions to help guide your reflection and discussion.

- 1. What stood out to you from Malia's or Gift's story?**
- 2. What do their stories reveal about how disabled people are treated today?**
- 3. Evaluate SCIAF and Sudan Evangelical Mission's (SEM) response.**

Gift



This is Gift (4) and his mum Charity.

Charity became worried when Gift failed to meet key developmental milestones. At six months old, he couldn't sit up and by one year old he couldn't stand on his own. Charity told us,

"When he was born, he was not able to sit down and stretch his back, has always been bent. Many people spoke negatively about his sickness, that the baby could be possessed.

I was really stressed and I had a lot going through my mind. I was wondering if my son would ever walk. I also had my neighbours who spoke ill of me and my son to deal with. There was a lot of talk in the village of how my son could be evil.

Life for Gift and Charity has completely changed since being in touch with our partners at SEM. Through different types of intervention, Gift gained strength and stability that allowed him to sit. Soon he was trained on how to stand and take small steps. Our partner has also provided Gift with a child walker which he uses to support himself..

Charity spoke to us about how their lives have changed.

"I am very grateful for the help we have received. My son is now well and able to walk on his own.. I nearly gave up but the SEM team supported me and really stood by me. They assured me that my son will walk and despite some difficulties he has improved a lot.."

Charity had one more message to share with SCIAF supporters in Scotland. She said,

"Tell them that the woman whom you helped, both she and her son are now very happy. Let them continue with the same work and may God help them."

Malia



This is Malia (6).

Malia developed a condition called hydrocephalus after birth. Hydrocephalus causes a build-up of excess fluids in the brain, which leads to increased head circumference and developmental delays. At the age of one, Malia was still unable to hold her head on her own and she could neither sit nor stand by herself. By five years old, she still could not walk.

Malia needed urgent surgery to fix a tube (shunt) in her head to drain the excess fluids. Malia's mum, Rina, told us about what it was like before our partners at the Sudanese Evangelical Mission (SEM) were able to provide lifesaving care to her daughter. Rina said,

"By that time my child was very sick. I had visited all the hospitals but all in vain. My daughter's head was very big and she struggled to find her balance. She spent most of her time lying on her side. It was very hurtful for me to see my child like this.

Many people in the village warned me that my daughter would eventually die, but I had trust that my child would be ok. I love her very much."

Malia also suffered from bullying and children teased her about the size of her head. People in the community also rejected her because her disability.

Our partners at SEM were able to her support Malia and her family through doctor's appointments, referrals and surgery. They also worked with Malia to build her strength, mobility. Today, Malia is able to walk by herself without any assistive device, assist her mother at home with household activities, play with her friends and go to school independently.

Rina told us more about how much SEM's support has meant to her family. She said,

"I am very grateful to them, and I want this work to continue helping those in need like my daughter. Thank you!!! Thank you!!! Thank you!!!! I could not imagine my daughter would get better let alone be able to walk. Whenever I meet SCIAF's partners, I imagine them as my family members because of the way they took care of us."