

Raising a Child with Special Needs

With Kurt Bruner, The Center for Strong Families

Only those with first-hand experience truly understand the blessing and challenges of raising a child with special needs. Parenting is hard work under the best of circumstances. When you add managing the needs of a child with physical or mental disabilities it can bring a whole new level of physical and emotional stress for parents. But it also brings a level of joy others rarely comprehend.

Whether you have just recently received a troubling diagnosis, are moving into a new stage of care, or have just started attending this church, we want to be a source of encouragement and hope as you fulfill your calling to parent a child with special needs.

We believe every child is a gift from God made in His image and reflecting His dignity. We also consider those caring for children with special needs worthy of special honor and support. To become intentional about your unique situation, we encourage you to reflect on your blessing, your call and your challenge.

YOUR BLESSING: A special connection

Those nurturing a child with special needs often encounter the heart of God in ways that can only be described as a spiritual mystery. While these children may be unable to participate in certain physical and/or academic pursuits, they can thrive in the most important arena of life – the spirit. Even those who can't understand the written word of God embody what it means to love and be loved as one totally dependent upon the Giver and Sustainer of life. And those honored to serve these children are given a unique connection with the God whose image they bear – seen in a gazing smile, a shrieking laugh, or an unspoken moment of delight that proclaims to all “the refreshing water of God’s joy is available to us all.”

YOUR CALL: Laying down your life

You have one of the most difficult yet vital callings in the kingdom of God. But how can you maintain the ongoing energy and passion needed to parent a child with special needs?

There’s no other way to do it than to daily embrace the call to lay down your life. Philippians 2 says:

Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death - even death on a cross! (Philippians 2:5-8).

All Christian parents are called to mirror Jesus by taking on “the very nature of a servant” at home. But it is especially real in the midst of the never ending sacrifices demanded of those caring for special needs. Even if those around you never understand the load you bear, you play a part that is immensely important from God’s perspective and is credited as serving Christ himself (Matthew 25:40).

YOUR CHALLENGE: Finding support and replenishment

Whether your child has mild or severe needs, you require replenishment in order to stay faithful and avoid burnout. You need practical help and spiritual nourishment. Stephen Covey talks about the importance of “sharpening the saw”—of prioritizing physical, emotional and spiritual restoration so that your efforts can be fueled with new strength and purpose. Following that advice is an extra challenge for you— but even more essential. You and your child need periodic breaks. Of course, making that happen can be difficult because very few offer to help and those who do may not understand what to do, your child’s unique needs, or just how hard it can be.

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