



## WHAT'S SO SPECIAL ABOUT MINISTRY FOR THOSE WITH SPECIAL NEEDS?

April 26, 2014

### Sabbath School Program

Statistically, you probably have two working arms, two working legs, two eyes with at least adequate vision, and two ears capable of hearing most or all of what you need to hear. A broken elevator is an inconvenience, not a deal breaker.

You probably have mental abilities falling into the area loosely called “average.” This means that you might not read Stephen Hawking’s latest “popular” tome on cosmology for pleasure, but that you are perfectly capable of puzzling out the tangled plots and subplots of the typical miniseries on premium cable, or understanding the instructions for putting together an IKEA computer desk.

What all this means is that if you are part of the majority, the world you see around you, and that you encounter as you leave your doorstep, was built by people like you, for people like you. You have some tremendous advantages in navigating this world, and most likely you are mostly unconscious of it. There is nothing wrong with this, and it certainly doesn’t make you a bad person, but (as the young people say) “It is what it is.”

But what if it weren’t that way? Outside of the Twilight Zone, you are not going to wake up one day as a member of a different ethnic group or gender. But any one of us is merely an accident or illness away from becoming a person with “special needs.” And most people lose at least some of their abilities as they age anyway. So if you don’t have “special needs” now, you are likely to have them at some point in the future.

And then there is our duty as Christians to “the least of these” (Matt. 25:45). We don’t just wait for people to come to us with their needs; we actively seek them out, following the example of our Lord and Savior. If you have no special needs, consider it a gift. God gives us gifts so we can bless others. What are you doing with yours?

**After giving a brief introduction to the topic such as the one above consider one or more of the following learning activities:**

- Discuss popular stereotypes or misconceptions about people with disabilities. Many people are uncomfortable talking or interacting normally with people with special needs. They may feel pity for them, or not know what to say. On one hand, they may ignore those with disabilities. At the other extreme, they may show no awareness of or respect for the disabled person’s boundaries, offering unwanted help, advice, or physical contact.

They may hold stereotypes such as that all people with disabilities are bitter about their disabilities. Conversely, they may believe, in the words of a character on a popular television series, that “handicapped people are nice, Leonard. Everyone knows that.” Emphasize that disabled people are, first of all, people.

- Invite a person with disabilities to speak to your class. They can discuss the difficulties and triumphs of their lives, the unique obstacles that they may encounter as they go about their day, and how they want to be treated. For example, when is help welcome? When is it not? What are some misunderstandings they’ve encountered? Provide time for questions.

- If this option is not available, invite someone from an advocacy organization. There are undoubtedly some of these in your community.

● Many of us have had some experience of being temporarily disabled by illness or injury. Ask if anyone in your group has had such an experience. What was it like? Did people react to you differently? Did they stare? How did it make you feel?

● Discuss what the Bible has to say about the disabled or those with special needs. Some good places to begin:

John 9:2-7

Exodus 4:11

2 Corinthians 12:19.

Be sure to include context. On a related point, discuss the physical challenges faced by Moses (Exod. 4:10) and/or Paul (2 Cor. 12:7).

● Discuss your church's outreach to the special needs community. Does your church or anyone in your church do anything to help or minister to those with special needs? Is your church friendly and accessible to people with physical or mental challenges? Where is there room for improvement?

**Conclude with one or more of the following selections from the *Seventh Day***

***Adventist Hymnal:***

575—"Let Your Heart Be Broken"

580—"This Little Light of Mine"

587—"In Christ There Is No East or West"

355—"Where Cross the Crowded Ways of Life"