



SPECIAL NEEDS AWARENESS

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Sabbath School Program ALL ARE GIFTED, NEEDED AND TREASURED

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Perhaps you remember the days in Sabbath School when you sang the following words:

O be careful, little eyes, what you see,
O be careful, little eyes, what you see,
For the Father up above is looking down in love,
O be careful, little eyes, what you see.

Other verses admonish the ears to be careful what they hear, feet to be careful where they go, and tongues to be careful what they say. It is easy to sing these words without pausing to think what a privilege it is to have use of our eyes, ears, feet, and to have the ability to speak, but that isn't the case for everyone.

This Sabbath the emphasis is about ministry for those with special needs, sometimes referred to as ministry for those with disabilities. However, it is also a time to think about how a ministry with those who have special needs might be included in the activities of the church at all levels. Those with disabilities also have a desire to be involved with ministry for others and not just be the receivers. In this context, the Sabbath School song could have an even broader understanding: *do* be careful to see what God sees, hear what God hears, and go where God goes. Set your mind on things above. In other words, we must allow the Creator of all to show us how to see, how to understand, and how to walk with those whose disabilities at first may seem limiting. Instead of viewing them for what they cannot do, we can see them as being created in the image of God—filled with possibilities. Recognizing this is a reminder that *all* are invited to be ministers and not just to be ministered to. Special needs ministries are a reminder that “Total Member Involvement” excludes no one. *All are gifted, needed, and treasured!*

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

- Discuss the following: If 27 of the 35 recorded miracles of Jesus touched someone with special needs, do you feel that special needs ministries should be part of the church's ministry just prior to His Second Coming?
- Consider the personal implications of the following statement by Ellen White, “I saw that it is in the providence of God that widows and orphans, the blind, the deaf, the lame, and persons afflicted in a variety of ways, have been placed in close Christian relationship to His church; it is to prove His people and develop their true character. Angels of God are watching to see how we treat these persons who need our sympathy, love, and disinterested benevolence. *This is God's test of our character*” (Vol. 3, *Testimonies to the Church*, p. 511). How would this be a test of our character as individuals and as a local church?

- Invite a person with disabilities to speak to your Sabbath School. 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 and when is it not? Are there particular terms that are offensive when used about their disability?