

GO

Lives and
communities
transformed
through
encounter with
Jesus Christ

Spring
2026

 Interserve

GO WITH A DIFFERENCE

Disability and
neurodiversity
in mission



Seen and sent

Each day we pause at 12:30 for prayers. Recently we explored the miraculous healing of the woman who touched the hem of Jesus' cloak. What struck me was not only the healing, but that Jesus calls her "Daughter". Long excluded, she is restored by a God who knows her. It echoes the story of Hagar in the wilderness, who names God El-Roi, "the God who sees". I was reminded too of a colleague in Central Asia whose ministry involved sitting with beggars on street corners. Yes, she offered food and explored what she could do to support them. But she also showed them love and dignity; "God sees you," she would say.

Disability is part of our wider priority to embrace diversity in God's mission – seeing people fully, valuing their gifts, and creating pathways for participation across cultures, generations, and all God-given differences. "Seeing" should never be passive. As you read this edition of GO, you will encounter stories of wheelchairs repaired and lives opened up, of mission families once sidelined finding belonging, and of people with disabilities not treated as problems to manage, but as people to love, learn, and serve alongside.

This issue also has a slightly different shape. We encourage you to linger with the Bible study at the end, to dig deeper into what it means to truly see and serve one another as God calls us.

Phil Lewis

National Director - Interserve Great Britain & Ireland



Contents

- 3-5** **Rewriting the rules**
Changing the story of disability in mission
- 5-7** **Called as I am**
Serving with neurodiversity
- 8-9** **A mother's heart**
Finding comfort for a life of love
- 10-11** **Learning to love**
A year with Thailand's Wheelchair Project
- 12-13** **The God who sees, hears and asks**
Jesus teaches us about inclusion and belonging



Interserve Great Britain & Ireland

Interserve (England office), Interserve GBI,
PO Box 17750, Birmingham, B9 9NU

03333 601 600

Email: info@interserve.org.uk

www.interserve.org.uk

Interserve Great Britain & Ireland is registered in England as The International Service Fellowship Trust, a company limited by guarantee, registered number 2789773, registered charity number 1020758, Scottish charity number SC005316.

Picture credits:

cover - FGTradeLatin/istock.com , p3 - LordHenriVoton/istock.com , p4 - StockPlanets/istock.com, p7 - FatCamera/istock.com, p8 - Satjawat/Adobe Stock.com, p12 - Sree Sadhin Chandro/Shutterstock.com, p14 - Caramel/istock.com, back - EyeEm Mobile GmbH/istock.com

All pictures, except for p11 are for illustrative purposes only. Subjects have no connection to the stories.

Editor: Amy Durrant, amyd@isgbi.org

Design: heatherknight.me.uk

Printed by Yeomans

Rewriting the rules

Changing the story of disability in mission

INTERSERVE PARTNER SOPHIE*, A QUALIFIED PHYSIOTHERAPIST, SHARES HER REFLECTIONS ON SERVING IN SOUTH ASIA WITH HER THREE AUTISTIC CHILDREN

When we joined Interserve, I discovered I had found my 'tribe'! I've been involved in overseas mission and Bible college for over 30 years, but I can count on one hand the number of people I've met serving with any kind of disability. I don't yet see other families like ours on the mission field. But there are voices that are starting to be heard. Interserve are swimming against the tide in terms of willingness to accept that people and families with disabilities can serve and thrive where God calls them to be.



When we first applied to serve with another mission agency some years ago, I was told at my first interview that it was selfish to take a child with additional needs overseas. Their greatest concern was that my child would be an inconvenience to whatever school they attended. Other mission leaders have told me that we are irresponsible parents for being here, and we've frequently been made to feel that we're a 'problem family'. When my husband applied for a leadership role within a local Christian organisation, he was deemed unsuitable for the job because his children are autistic.

Our family have been serving in South Asia for nearly ten years, and we would choose to do so again, no question about it. It was an excellent move for the children, and God has provided wonderful specialists along the way who have offered far more support and therapy than they might have received in the UK. The outdoor lifestyle suits our kids well, and they have experienced much less pressure

through their teenage years than in a large British secondary school.

Of course it's true that aspects of the overseas mission life are more challenging when you are neurodiverse. The last-minute uncertainty of visa applications and managing others' expectations for home assignments are hard for anyone, but even harder for neurodiverse children whose brains need familiar places and routines to function well. And the transience of the mission community has been especially tough on our kids. There are times when having three autistic children is very, very hard. But that would be true wherever we were living. There are limits on us that we

◆ We know that God didn't make a mistake when He made our kids, and that we didn't make a mistake in following His call to serve Him here.



wouldn't have with neurotypical children; but we know that God didn't make a mistake when He made our kids, and that we didn't make a mistake in following His call to serve Him here.

I have had so many ministry opportunities through being a mum to autistic kids. If Christians are always the strong, perfect, got-life-together ones, we miss out on important opportunities to journey with hurting people as fellow travellers, rather than from a position of power. I volunteered on the first 'Joni and Friends' family disability camp in our area, with around 20 families affected by all kinds of disability. One local mum with an autistic child seemed very reserved, until she heard about my family. Suddenly I wasn't some white foreign expert telling her what to do, but a fellow traveller who knew about the messiness of life with an autistic child. She opened up in a powerful way and I was able to minister to her from that place of shared experience, demonstrating Jesus' love through counter-cultural acceptance and inclusion.

I'm a physio by background, and currently studying a master's degree in Theology and Disability. The other students are from very different backgrounds and traditions, and it's been brilliant hearing different views and experiences, and having time to think through things biblically. My first essay explored 'Are we disabled in heaven?' I'd been taught that we'd be absolutely 'perfect' in heaven, but what does that mean? If you have Down syndrome, what is 'wrong' with that? If someone was 'cured' of Down syndrome, how would you even recognise them in Heaven? Starting to think about this has really challenged my own assumptions. I'd love my autistic children to be just as they are in heaven, though I long to see their distress gone.

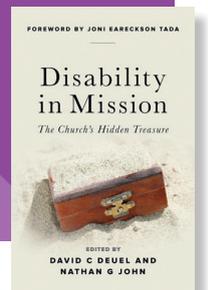
Last year I joined a small group of people who meet monthly online to look at disability and mission across the fellowship. The international leadership have asked us to explore how Interserve can include and send more people with disabilities. We're building up a network, thinking about how we do training, feeling our way forwards, recognising, of course, that this will be unique for each person. There are parts of this region that are extremely challenging for wheelchair users, for example, but other areas of the world where a Partner in a wheelchair could thrive.

A generation ago, women and people of colour were regularly excluded from service or leadership in many mission agencies, and that feels shocking now. I hope that in a generation we'll be just as shocked that people who are blind, who use a wheelchair, or are autistic, are still turned away from serving in cross-cultural mission. We can each play a part in that change of culture. ♦

* Name changed for security



Want to think more about disability in mission? During 2026, Interserve's International Leadership Team are reading: *Disability in Mission: The Church's Hidden Treasure* (Hendrickson Publishers, 2019)



Called as I am

serving with neurodiversity

KAT SHARES HER EXPERIENCE OF SHARING THE GOSPEL WITH ASYLUM-SEEKERS IN THE UK AS AN INTERSERVE PARTNER WITH AUTISM AND ADHD

I'm Kat, and I have Autism and ADHD. This recent revelation has been both joyful ("I'm not broken and flawed - I'm just wired differently and that's ok!") and scary ("You mean these challenges won't eventually go away? They'll always be there because my brain is created different?"). When I saw a call-out from the Interserve office to share stories about this, it set my brain fizzing like a bath bomb!

My sense of otherness probably played a significant part in choosing to work with asylum seekers. Working amongst huge cultural variety brings grace for my quirks! Most of my life has been spent trying to look "normal" – or at least normal enough to blend in and be accepted. People call it "masking", but for me it's more like a lifelong tug-of-war between wanting to fit in and wanting to be fully, unapologetically myself. There's a fair amount of oddness in me that I don't bother hiding, yet the effort of appearing socially acceptable while also longing for authenticity is exhausting.

STRUCTURE AND SPONTANEITY

The autism within me craves structure and continuity. The ADHD part craves novelty and creativity. It's a daily battle, but also a gift. Take prayer - I need my morning quiet time to feel grounded, yet I long for something fresh. New routines excite me but quickly become draining, so I've built a rotating 'buffet' of prayer practices to keep things both steady and stimulating.

This same need for both rhythm and spontaneity shapes my working week. I plan carefully so I can enter the week calmly, but I'm delighted when something gets cancelled – I'll message one of the women I work with and suggest meeting up. They tend to live with more spontaneity – if I ask about meeting up next month, in typical British fashion, it's often met with blank expressions. But last-second visits, unexpected cups of tea, and spontaneous shared meals are a thrill for me and key to my ministry.



HIGH STANDARDS, LITERALISM AND ACCEPTANCE

As per the stereotype, I often take things quite literally and can hold myself to impossibly high standards. I'm easily stressed if I'm spending time on something that doesn't fit neatly into my sense of 'vision'. And knowing that people support my ministry financially adds to a sense of failure on days when I haven't explicitly shared the gospel. I forget that relationships take time, and not every conversation needs to be profound. I've also spent years chasing acceptance because I've always felt different. So, talking about faith, I often feel torn between wanting to avoid offence and wanting to be honest. Learning to be bold but not blunt, and sensitive without diluting the truth, feels like a balancing act that may take a lifetime to master!

All of this learning, and unlearning, and balancing, and striving - to share appropriately, to not be too weird, or too assertive, or too people-pleasing, or too loud, or too quiet, or too guarded, or too

vulnerable, or too much... it ultimately leads me to ask God, 'Who am I really, beneath the masking and expectations? And what could it mean to really show up, as my true authentic self, without hiding any part of me?' I'm still figuring it out, but I'm grateful for God's patience and for friends who walk with me.

Ministry is rarely simple, and the additional complex tightrope of neurodiversity can be overwhelming at times. But I trust that where God calls, He equips. He made me this way, and He'll continue to shape and use me, quirks and all. The fruit is ultimately His. What a relief. ♦

Read more stories about disability and neurodiversity on our blog: interserve.org.uk/blog



A mother's heart

Finding strength
for a life of
love



KHADIJA*, A PAKISTANI MOTHER WITH FIVE CHILDREN, SHARES HER EXPERIENCES OF CARING FOR HER DAUGHTER WITH CEREBRAL PALSY AND FINDING SUPPORT FROM THE ST JOHN'S HOUSE COMMUNITY IN BIRMINGHAM

I have five children, and when my youngest was born, everything seemed ok. But after a year, she couldn't crawl, couldn't stand, couldn't walk, and I found out that she has special needs. In all my family, there have never been any disabled children. Only my daughter.

When Mariam was young, we spent time at the hospital seeing doctors, and every Monday we went to a child development centre nearby. But she couldn't speak, couldn't eat properly, not even drinking milk. When she was five years old, she weighed only 12 pounds. I was so upset, I would cry every night. It was a very difficult time. Health visitors and other ladies came to my house to give advice. They gave me exercises to do, over two



“

This is my second home, and the women here bring me comfort – they are my sisters, my daughters.

hours every day. And she couldn't eat real food. If I put rice in her mouth she would vomit. The doctors wanted to give her a feeding tube, but I didn't want that for her. She would only eat french fries, crisps. So I started to put three or four grains of rice in the mouth with a crisp, and she started to bite. Slowly, slowly, over five years, she started to eat proper food, and to be able to crawl and stand. I was struggling so much myself, but she was improving. And when she first started walking, at the airport when my sister was on her way to Pakistan, I was so shocked and happy!

Mariam is 27 now. She first went to a special school, and now goes to a day centre nearby. I work hard to look after

her and it's not easy for me at all. I have so much back pain, and I'm suffering from arthritis as well. But my daughter, she's okay. She's happy. She loves music, and children's programmes like Mr Tumble. She can't speak, but she can point, and her face tells us what she's thinking. My other children are grown up now, but the whole family loves her. She's always with us, she comes to funerals and weddings, goes out with us. My husband added an extension to our house and a special room and shower for Mariam. People said we could we could get a grant for this, but my husband said, "This is my daughter. This is my responsibility. I don't need any funding." I'm very proud of him.

Eleven or twelve years ago my older daughter found out about St John's House and started bringing me here. Now I come every week for ladies groups and English classes. I have a lot of stress, but when I come here and chat with people, my stress is relieved. My family say this is very good for me. When things were closed over Christmas time, I felt depressed. This is my second home, and the women here bring me comfort – they are my sisters, my daughters. Mariam loves coming here as well. I tell other women, "You must come and join". Last year my eldest went through some very bad anxiety and depression, and I brought her here as well. Just being here helped her so much.

I used to think that Christianity allowed many bad things, until I started to read the Bible. Sometimes people are confusing. But it's important to read and listen carefully, and then decide. Now I read the stories to my grandchildren. I ask God to give me good health and a good heart. I can't always expect help from other people, but He is holding my rope. I thank my God. ♦

* Name changed for security

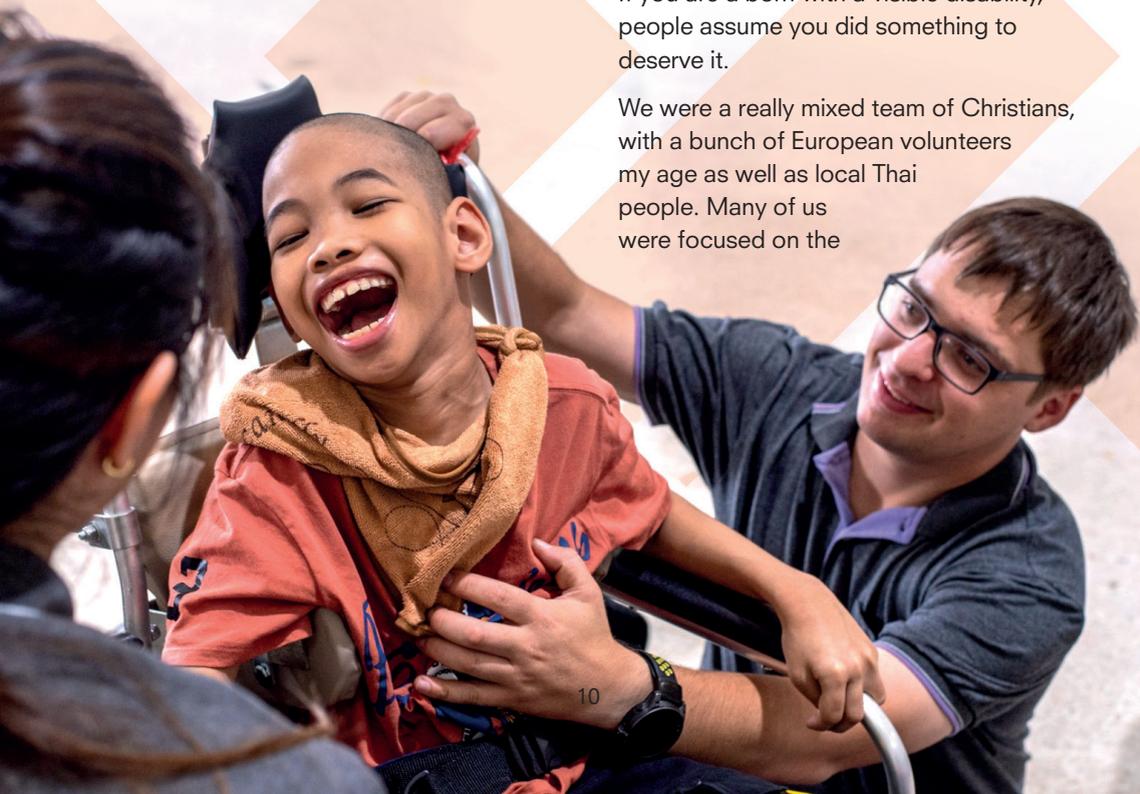
Learning to love

A year with Thailand's Wheelchair Project

TYLER*, A BRITISH UNIVERSITY STUDENT, JOINED OUR SHORT-TERM 'ON TRACK' PROGRAMME TO VOLUNTEER WITH A THAI WHEELCHAIR PROJECT

God has been amazing in my life. I wanted to share some of that with other people, and to deepen my faith and understanding. I had the opportunity to spend a year working with the RICD Wheelchair Project, providing wheelchairs and mobility aids for those who most need them. Access to mobility aids can be quite tough in Thailand. Local beliefs mean that there are strong social prejudices against those with disabilities. If you are born with a visible disability, people assume you did something to deserve it.

We were a really mixed team of Christians, with a bunch of European volunteers my age as well as local Thai people. Many of us were focused on the



engineering and technical side of things – donated wheelchairs are sent from all over the world, and we would fix them up in the workshop. About once a month we travelled out to different hospitals to distribute hundreds of chairs and other mobility aids. A group of Thai partners who understood the cultural context would then offer follow up, helping with wheelchair skills and maintenance, as well as sharing the gospel with people.

My first wheelchair distribution was, without a doubt, one of the high points of my life so far. They were long days, but worth it. I'd spent ages fixing up a walker with wheels on the bottom, sometimes used by younger people building up capacity to walk. A seventeen-year-old arrived, basically the same age as me. He had never walked on his own. He'd always needed support to go anywhere, and he was desperate to go to school by himself. Watching him walk by himself for the first time, and the smile that lit up his face, was incredible. It was amazing to be a small part of that moment. Suddenly, someone who had been entirely dependent on others was able to engage with their life in a whole new way. It's something that I've always taken for granted, and I never lost the wonder of watching people discover this for the first time.

There were real challenges too though, knowing the limits of what we could offer compared to the help people might have received if they had simply been born in another country. It was very high highs, and low lows.

Something we were encouraged to do early on, was to spend at least a full day in a wheelchair ourselves. I suddenly realised there are steps everywhere and they're an absolute nightmare to get

up, even in the hospital where I worked. You notice so many things. Just getting dressed in the morning was so difficult. It really helped me gain perspective, and I have a newfound respect for people who manage this all their lives.

I met so many people through the year, both international and local Christians, who've dedicated their lives to God and to helping other people. My boss was deeply inspiring, with such a passion for people and for God. And one of the physical therapists instilled in me to never simply see a medical condition, but to always see the person. That's incredibly important. Seeing how Partners and staff there shared God's help and love with others was amazing. I was inspired to see what life truly lived for Christ can look like. ♦

* Name changed for security

Tyler (pictured below) spent a year serving in the Wheelchair Project workshop



Interested in exploring short term opportunities to serve with Interserve? Visit interserve.org.uk/on-track or email start@interserve.org.uk to find out more.

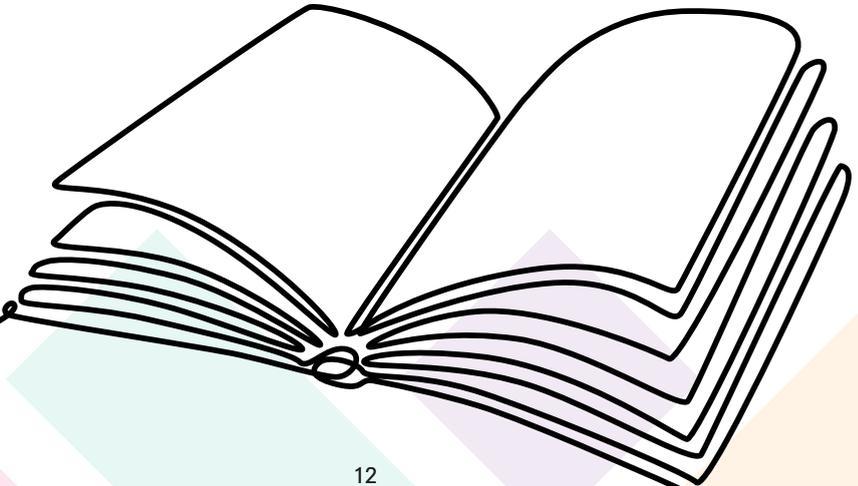


The God who sees, hears and asks

Where Jesus teaches
us about inclusion
and belonging

Throughout the gospels we see Jesus encounter people with disabilities and health conditions. Our skim reading often goes like this... Jesus meets disabled person, Jesus heals disabled person, everyone moves on. But we hope that by exploring five stories below, whether

individually or with others, that you will discover there is much more that Jesus shows and teaches us through these encounters; important lessons and questions raised.



1

BARTIMAEUS, A MAN BORN BLIND

Read: Matthew 20:29-34, Mark 10:46-52, Luke 18:35-43

Key phrase: *“Son of David”*

Surprise: Jesus asked Bartimaeus a question, rather than assuming what he wanted and deciding for him.

Key verse: *“What do you want me to do for you?” Jesus asked him.* Mark 10:51

Jesus had walked the road to Jericho before, passed where Bartimaeus begged, on this occasion Bartimaeus called out “Son of David have mercy on me!”. What happened next often happens to disabled people today; he was told to be quiet. Jesus heard him and responded. Jesus

knew that Bartimaeus was blind; as God made flesh, he knew what he wanted, but did he assume and heal him? No, he did something important first, he asked him a question... “What do you want me to do for you?” The gathered crowd must have been incredulous, but by asking the question Jesus gave Bartimaeus dignity and respect and allowed him to express what was on his heart... “Rabbi, I want to see.” We could do a lot worse than follow Jesus’ lead when we meet someone with a disability.

Questions:

- 1 Do we ever unintentionally overlook or silence the voices of disabled people?
- 2 How might asking someone what they need—rather than assuming—help them feel respected and valued?

2

A WOMAN WHO IS BLEEDING

Read: Matthew 9:20-22, Mark 5:25-34, Luke 8:42-48

Key word: *“Daughter”*

Surprise: Jesus called her out in front of everyone.

Key verse: *‘Then he said to her, “Daughter, your faith has healed you. Go in peace.”’* Luke 8:48

Did this healing take Jesus by surprise? Maybe... he knew that power had gone out of him and wanted to know who had touched him. It may seem cruel of Jesus to call her forward - but if she had just crept away, would anyone have believed her healing? She had been considered ‘unclean’ for over 12 years. By calling

her out and making her publicly tell her story Jesus didn’t just heal her physically, he restored her socially too. He called her “Daughter” and said her faith had healed her; he declared her healed, whole, belonging. She was back!

Questions:

- 1 Being fully restored socially as well as physically, what would this woman now be able to do again? Why would that be transforming for her?
- 2 What could being socially restored mean for a disabled person today in your church context?
- 3 What is the difference between being included and truly belonging?

3

A PARALYSED MAN WITH FAITHFUL FRIENDS

Read: Matthew 9:1-18, Mark 2:1-12, Luke 5:17-26

Key word: "Friend"

Surprise: In all the commotion, Jesus saw the man's faith first and forgave him his sins.

Key verse: 'When Jesus saw their faith, he said, "Friend, your sins are forgiven."' Matthew 9:2

To Jesus, the man and his friends' faith was the most important thing, this defined their eternal status. He saw the person first and called him "friend", how amazing

is that? His disability wasn't as important to Jesus as his faith, and he only restored the use of the man's legs to prove he had the authority to forgive sins too. That isn't to trivialise the man's disability, or diminish the impact on him of his healing, but to emphasise that in eternal terms faith is more important than healing.

Questions:

- 1 Why do you think Jesus prioritised the man and his friends' faith? What does this teach us about how we value people?
- 2 Why do we sometimes focus on someone's disability before we see the person themselves?

4

A DEAF MAN WHO DIDN'T SPEAK

Read: Mark 7:31-37

Key phrase: A deep sigh, followed by "Ephphatha!"

Surprise: Jesus took the man aside to give him dignity.

Key verse: 'He looked up to heaven and with a deep sigh said to him "Ephphatha!" (which means "Be opened!").' Mark 7:4

Jesus takes the man away from the crowd before healing him, treating him with dignity and respect, but the manner of the healing is more intimate than others. He touched the man's ears and spat and touched the man's tongue. Why? I believe Jesus used sensory methods of

communication to show the man that he was healing him, to help him understand what was happening. I may be stretching things a little here, but I also wonder if Jesus took the inability to hear and speak from the man into his own body, struggled with it, and then looked to heaven and sighed he spoke. And the first word the man ever heard was that word spoken by Jesus himself... "Ephphatha!" ("Be opened!")

Questions:

- 1 What impact might it have had on this man to be treated with such dignity, privacy, and respect?
- 2 What can we learn from Jesus' use of sensory and accessible communication?

5**A DISABLED WOMAN****Read:** Luke 13:10-17**Key phrase:** *'Jesus saw her...'***Surprise:** Jesus stopped in the middle of teaching in the Synagogue to tend to the woman's needs immediately.**Key verse:** *'Jesus saw her. He asked her to come to him. He said to her, "Woman, you will no longer be disabled. I am about to set you free."'*
Luke 13:12

A short but significant encounter. It was the Sabbath, and Jesus was at the synagogue, teaching. Someone caught his eye, caused him to immediately stop what he was doing, and take compassionate, life changing, action. A woman was there who had been disabled

for 18 years; she was bent over and could not stand up straight. He noticed her and called her to him so that he could heal her there and then. She had struggled for 18 years; there was no need for her to wait a minute longer. Jesus was criticised for healing her on the Sabbath, but he turned the criticism back on his accusers.

Questions:

- 1 Are there times when we fail to notice someone who may need support or care?
- 2 What helps us pause and respond to the needs right in front of us, even when we're busy?
- 3 Do we ever delay offering help until it feels more convenient? How can we respond with greater compassion and urgency?

Having looked at these five encounters that Jesus had with people with disabilities or complex health conditions, what surprised you the most? What have you learned? What will you change?

**MARK ARNOLD**

Additional Needs Ministry Director, Urban Saints

Mark Arnold has decades of experience helping churches create safe and inclusive spaces for children with additional needs. In this tour of the gospels, he provides insights into why it's important, and how we can create more inclusive spaces for people with additional needs in our contexts.

Find out more:

urbansaints.org/additionalneeds

theadditionalneedsblogfather.com





 Interserve
Weavers

The Weavers are a community of committed supporters across GBI who pray, give, and champion the work of Interserve. They are the fabric that holds our mission together – and **nothing we do would be possible without them.**

As a Weaver, you'll receive:

- ◆ Exclusive online events
- ◆ An annual Weavers-only report
- ◆ NEW for 2026: Regional in-person gatherings

If you would like to join the Weavers, simply complete the enclosed form or visit:
interserve.org.uk/weavers

