

## NT 3XD3/6XD6 Disability Studies and the Bible

**Online: January–April 2020**  
**Face-to-face: Feb 18 (9am–4pm)**  
**Feb 19 (9am–1pm)**

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**Office Hours: Mon 10–12; Tue 2–4**

### **COURSE DESCRIPTION**

“Those parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable” (1 Cor 12:22). The late founder of L’Arche, Jean Vanier, once lamented that these words of Paul are never taken seriously in the discussion of Christian ecclesiology, particularly in the topic of disability and the church. What the Apostle Paul suggests here is that what makes the church different from other social groups is the inclusion and empowerment of the so-called “weaker” members. The very identity of a believing community as the body of Christ is its willingness to embrace those members that are deemed “weak” (according to various secular “standards” or cultural understanding of normalcy) and empower them to be Christ’s disciples.

However, the witness of the Bible regarding this topic is far from unified. People with physical and cognitive disabilities are often depicted in problematic ways. They are depicted as outcast and marginalized, categorically excluded from leadership and participation in cultic service (Lev 21:17–23), and exiled from the city (2 Sam 5:8), and they are used as a plot device for making larger theological points (such as John 5 and 9). These diverse portrayals of disability raise not only exegetical concerns but also homiletical and pastoral ones.

This course is an exegetical study of biblical texts that portray (and sometimes stigmatize) disability and the disabled mind and body. We will analyze these texts by contextualizing them historically and ideologically, taking into account both ancient perspectives on health care and disability as well as modern assumptions in ableist hermeneutics. The main objective is to seek to determine how a culture’s understanding of the make-up of body and mind contributes to the ways in which disability are described in cultural artefacts (i.e. texts). We will provide a safe space in class (and online) to question the problematic texts and to reflect together on the pastoral implications of such literature. Our goal is to work collaboratively towards a biblical theological understanding of disability.

### ***Hybrid Format***

Because this is a hybrid course, it is structured around online instructions and discussions. Assigned readings will be used to introduce the student to the topic. An online forum will be set up on Avenue to Learn (A2L) to facilitate a collaborative learning environment. Students are also encouraged to visit the instructor during office hours (or by appointment) to discuss any questions raised in the forum and/or the assignments.

## **SPECIALIZATIONS**

### **Biblical Studies (BS)**

Students taking this as a Biblical Studies course will be encouraged to explore the historical and cultural setting of the biblical texts on disability, as well as scholarly debates concerning the interpretation of their contents.

### **Pastoral Studies (PS)**

Student taking this as a Pastoral Studies course will be encouraged to explore how the biblical teaching on disability is relevant for Christian faith and practice in the contemporary world.

### **Christian Worldview (CW)**

Students taking this as a Christian Worldview course will be encouraged to explore biblical texts through the lens of the power dynamics that operate between the ableists and people with disability, and hence to observe ideologies of disability at work in the texts.

### **Church & Culture (CC)**

Students taking this as a Church and Culture course will be encouraged to explore the culture setting of the biblical texts on disability and compare it to the contemporary cultural landscape on disability and disabled mind and body.

### **MA/PhD Students**

MA/PhD students who wish to apply for this course as an elective (6-level course) for their degree program must consult with their primary supervisor and the course instructor to develop a set of extra assignments that fulfills the specific requirements of the (MA or PhD) program.

## **COURSE OBJECTIVES**

### Knowing:

- To become familiar with the problematic (biblical) texts on disability and disabled body;
- To analyze biblical texts with a critical mindset towards the power dynamics and ideologies of disability at work in the text;
- To know more advanced concepts for study of the exegetical methods that aid in the interpretation of individual passages.

### Being:

- To become sensitive to the historical and culture environment of the Bible;
- To appreciate the value of being able to exegete the text for use in ministry;
- To allow the texts to motivate, form and transform faith, worship and Christian way of life.

### Doing:

- To explain key topics and major exegetical issues related to disability studies and the Bible;
- To access resources that engage with literature in disability studies in a careful and critical manner;
- To articulate the social, cultural, and theological significance of disability and distinguish them from their ancient/biblical counterparts.

## COURSE REQUIREMENTS

Students are required to complete all of the following assignments. All assignments should be uploaded in PDF format to the designated Avenue to Learn (A2L) submission folder. No unfinished assignments are permitted. See below for late assignment policy.

1. Cultural Artefacts (15%). Students are to choose a contemporary cultural artefact that provides insight into how disability is portrayed and understood in society. These artefacts should be posted to a class bulletin board (either A2L or Padlet, details to follow) by **February 10 (11:59pm)**. Examples of a cultural artefact could be a current news story, an article, a blog post, a scene from a movie/show, a song, or even a short story (fictional or real). The initial post should include a brief description of the artefact to provide context. Students are expected to lead a short discussion time (5-10 mins) during the face-to-face session (see schedule below) to talk about the portrayal (positive and negative) of disability in the artefact and how it reflects an ideology and/or shared cultural values in modern society. Students should also compare the modern cultural assumptions with ancient perspectives on disability and the disabled body. The presentation should raise at least two questions for class discussion (during the face-to-face module).
2. Collaborative Resource Portal (Reading and Discussion) (20%). A resource portal will be created on A2L (or another platform) for students to record, summarize, and reflect on what they have learned in this class. The objective of this exercise is to create, in a collaborative manner, a guide book or a resource portal for clergies, church leaders, and Christian counsellors on the topic of disability and the Bible. Students taking this course as a 5/6 level course will be responsible for the write up of the week. Each week one of these students will post a one-page report (500-750 words) which includes: (1) a summary of the major points of discussion/contention; (2) major scholarly opinions regarding the text/topic; (3) pastoral implications/considerations for the contemporary church. The report will include one to two questions (pastoral, interpretive, theoretical, etc.) to provide a springboard for class discussion (on the A2L discussion forum).

It is expected that ALL students will actively participate in the online forum by posting to discussion topics on A2L discussion forum **each week**. Students **MUST** respond to its question(s) with insightful comments that further the online discussion. Insights can be drawn from reading the text and/or commentaries or other resources. These posts could include discussion of exegetical aspects, theological implications, or the contemporary significance of a text (or a particular topic). The report will be posted no later than Tuesday night (11:59pm) in order to allow enough time for interactions. The report writer (of the week) is then responsible for consolidating comments and revising the report by the end of the week (Friday at 11:59am). By the end of the term the notebook will be consolidated and distributed as a resource portal (format TBD: website, A2L document, bulletin board, wiki, etc.) to the class.

Each week, students are also required to read readings posted by the instructor on A2L. They should **indicate** on A2L whether they have finished the assigned reading for that week. In

addition to the weekly readings, students should come to the face-to-face class (Feb 18–19) having read the textbook (Yong 2011) in its entirety and should be prepared to contribute to a class discussion (refer to the course schedule for a list of in-class discussion topics). The overall grade for this requirement will be determined by both the student’s reading and his or her participation in the online forum and in-class discussion.

### 3. Specialization Book Report (25%):

Students are required to read a book (from the following list) that is appropriate to their chosen specialization and submit a written response that answers the following questions. Although the questions can be answered independently using a new heading for each, the thoughts included in each answer must be well organized and clearly presented in full paragraphs (i.e. these are to be formal responses). The entire reading response must be at least 1,500 words and must follow the “MDC Style Guidelines for Essays and Theses.” It is due at 11:59 pm on **Feb 17** (The day before the face-to-face meeting).

Biblical Studies (BS): Fox, Bethany McKinney. *Disability and the Way of Jesus*. Downer Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2019.

Pastoral Studies (PS): Beates, Michael S. *Disability and the Gospel: How God Uses Our Brokenness to Display His Grace*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012.

Church and Culture (CC): Jacober, Amy E. *Redefining Perfect: The Interplay Between Theology and Disability*. Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2017.

Christian Worldview (CW): Reynolds, Thomas E. *Vulnerable Communion: A Theology of Disability and Hospitality*. Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos, 2008.

#### a. ALL Specializations:

- Present five quotations from the book that made you stop and think, briefly explaining each choice.
- Where do you agree and disagree with the author on his/her understanding of disability and theology? You can also comment on the author’s handling of Scripture. Give three specific examples

#### b. Pastoral Studies (PS): How has this book deepened your understanding on the theology of disability and the church? Give three specific examples.

Biblical Studies (BS): How has this book deepened your understanding of the biblical teaching of disability? Give three specific examples.

Church & Culture (CC) and Christian Worldview (CW): How has the book deepened your understanding of the relevance of the teaching/discussion of disability (in Biblical/Theological studies) to the contemporary world? Give three specific examples.

#### 4. Specialization Project (40%):

This specialization specific assignment includes two elements: a presentation and peer feedback. Students will work with the instructor individually during week 9 for the assignment. They are to **write** and **present** their ideas during week 10 (exegetical sermon/teaching plan) **OR** week 11 (Disability Awareness Sunday) and then comment on other students' work during week 12 and 13. The online learning platform(s) for posting the presentation and hosting the discussion will be announced later.

BIBLICAL STUDIES (BS): Exegetical Paper. Students in the biblical studies specialization will select one self-contained passage (selected with the instructor) and complete an exegetical analysis (12-15 pages). This paper must follow the *MDC Style Guidelines for Essays and Theses*. For those who have never written an exegetical paper, a step-by-step guide will be provided at the first day of class. Additional online tutorial session can also be arranged to discuss the requirement for this paper. The paper should include:

- i. A clear statement of the thesis in the introduction
- ii. The historical and cultural contexts of the passage
- iii. Justification of text boundaries and explanation of how this passage fits within the overall argument of the text
- iv. A detailed (verse-by-verse) exegesis of the entire passage
- v. Theological reflections on the passage (either integrate with your exegesis or at the end of your paper)
- vi. A clear conclusion

Presentation: Due **March 15 (11:59pm)**

Collaboration: By **March 29 (11:59pm)**

Final Submission: **April 8 (11:59pm)**

PASTORAL STUDIES (PS): Sermon or Teaching Plan. Students are asked to write a sermon (2500–3500 words) based on a passage discussed in class. Paper Break Down: (1000-1500 words exegetical comment; 1500-2000 words sermon/teaching plan).

- a. The assignment consists of two parts. The first part is a 1000–1500-word exegetical comment on the selected passage (with at least 10 sources). Students are expected to be able to engage in exegetical analysis of a particular passage. Succinct comment should be made on particular exegetical issues and hermeneutical decisions regarding the selected passage. This part of the assignment must follow the MDC style guide.
- b. The second part of the assignment is a teaching/preaching component. It should be equivalent to a 20-minute presentation. It should be written in a spoken style, intended to be deliver from the pulpit or in a classroom setting. This part does not need to follow the style guide, but any dependence on specific sources (e.g. for illustrations) should be noted. The teaching project may include a teaching session for a Bible/small group study, a Sunday School course.

- c. A short summary of the real/imagined target audience (demographic background and preaching/teaching setting) as well as a brief description of your homiletic decisions are needed.
- d. The purpose of this assignment is to assess the student’s ability to (1) interpret a text (on disability) with a theologically and biblically sound hermeneutical method and, (2) apply the message to discipleship, community and ministry formation and presenting it in the contemporary contexts.
- e. **Presentations:** Students will present their sermon/teaching plan by posting a video of a dry run of the sermon/teaching plan. It should also include a brief prelude summarizing the major exegetical issues of the passage and the demographic of the intended audiences. The presentation is to be posted no later than **March 15** (Sunday at 11:59pm).
- f. **Collaboration:** On week 12 (Mar 23–29), students are required to post **constructive** comments to *all* papers/presentations. Comments should be critical but charitable, highlighting the strengths and weaknesses of the work. Either post a written response to the presentation or record a video comment and post it as a response.

Presentation: Due **March 15 (11:59pm)**

Collaboration: By **March 29 (11:59pm)**

Final Submission: **April 8 (11:59pm)**

CHURCH & CULTURE (CC) and CHRISTIAN WORLDVIEW (CW): Disability Awareness Sunday. Students in the Christian Worldview specialization are to plan a worship service and liturgy for a disability awareness Sunday. The goal is to help all (abled and disabled) members to: (1) realize they all are indispensable to the church community; and (2) discover their gifts and use them in ministry. The planning of the service could include an exegetical sermon/message, prayer and litany, liturgy, hymns/songs, devotional material, bulletin insert, presentation, images, simulation (with caution), and special arrangement for abled/disabled members. Denominational-specific liturgies can be used with proper citation and a brief description explaining the rationale of including such resources. Other helpful resources and samples will be distributed on A2L. A report with all relevant material (prayer, songs, liturgy, etc.) should be posted to A2L by **March 22 (11:59pm)**. The report should include the main theme/emphasis of the service and the rationale for including the chosen resources and arrangements. The report, excluding the material, should be 12-15 pages. On week 13 (Mar 30–Apr 5), students are to post **constructive** comments to *all* papers/presentations.

Initial Submission: **March 22 (11:59pm)**

Collaboration: By **April 5 (11:59)**

Final Submission: **April 8 (11:59pm)**

### Grading Summary:

1. Cultural Artefacts	15%
2. Collaborative Portal	20%
3. Specialization Book Report	25%

4. Specialization Final Project	40%
Total:	100%

## TEXTBOOK AND MATERIALS

### Required Reading:

1. A recent English translation of the Bible.
2. Supplementary weekly topical readings (provided by the professor on A2L).
3. Yong, Amos. *The Bible, Disability, the Church: A New Vision of the People of God*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2011.

**Optional:** Students are strongly encouraged to possess the following:

4. Melcher, Sarah J. et al., eds. *The Bible and Disability: A Commentary*. Waco, TX: Baylor, 2017.

All required textbooks for this class are available from the College's book service, READ On Bookstore, Room 145, McMaster Divinity College. Texts may be purchased on the first day of class. For advance purchase, you may contact READ On Bookstore, 5 International Blvd, Etobicoke, Ontario M9W 6H3; phone 416.620.2934; fax 416.622.2308; email [books@readon.ca](mailto:books@readon.ca). Other book services may also carry the texts.

## COURSE SCHEDULE (TENTATIVE)

Week	Date	Topic	Assignment
1	Jan 6	Course overview & introduction to the topic Online class meeting (WebEx) @Jan 6 10:30am EST*	
<b>Module One: Online (Preparation)</b>			
1	Jan 6–12	Disability Studies and Biblical Studies: Preliminary theoretical considerations	
2	Jan 13–19	Models of Disability Studies: Medical, social, and cultural models	
3	Jan 20–26	Disability (and disabled bodies) in Antiquity: Ancient Mesopotamian and Greco-Roman cultures	
4	Jan27–Feb 2	Cognitive Disabilities in the Bible	
5	Feb 3–9	Sensory and Mobility Disabilities in the Bible	Cultural Artefacts Due
6	Feb 10–16	Sexual and Reproductive Disabilities in the Bible	
<b>Module Two: Face-to Face (Discussion)</b>			

7	Feb 18 (9am-12pm)	<u>Lecture</u> : Disability and Biblical Hermeneutics <u>Discussion</u> : A Biblical Theology of Disability (I) Disability and the Law Disability and Miracles	Book Report Due
7	Feb 18 (1pm–4pm)	<u>Discussion</u> : A Biblical Theology of Disability (II) Disability and Ecclesiology Disability and Eschatology <u>Presentation/Discussion</u> : Cultural Artefacts <u>Workshop</u> : Specialization Project	
7	Feb 19 (9am–1pm)	<u>Lecture</u> : Disability and theories of metaphor <u>Presentation</u> : Guest Lecturer(s) (TBA) <u>Discussion</u> : Pastoral Reflections and Book Report	
<b>Module Three: Online (Collaboration)</b>			
8	Feb 24– Mar 1	Healing and Health Care in the Ancient World Healing, miracle, and disability (contemporary context)	
9	Mar 2–8	Working with the Instructor (Exegetical Sermon and Disability Awareness Sunday) One-on-one/small group online meetings	
10	Mar 9–15	Presentation: Exegetical Paper/Exegetical Sermon	Paper/Sermon Presentation
11	Mar 16– 22	Presentation: Disability Awareness Sunday	Service Presentation
12	Mar 23– 29	Student Collaboration: Exegetical Sermon	Paper/Sermon Comment
13	Mar 30– Apr 5	Student Collaboration: Disability Awareness Sunday	Service Comment
14	Apr 6–12	Conclusion: Towards a Biblical Theology of Disability Course Evaluation	Final papers due

\* Details on WebEx setup will be provided through email and A2L postings. All students need to attend this online class meeting.

#### REFERENCES (SELECTED)

Avalos, H. *Health Care and the Rise of Christianity*. Peabody: Hendrickson, 1999.

———. *Illness and Health Care in the Ancient Near East: The Role of the Temple in Greece, Mesopotamia, and Israel*. Harvard Semitic Monographs 54. Atlanta: Scholar, 1995.

Avalos, Hector, Sarah J. Melcher, and Jeremy Schipper, eds. *This Abled Body: Rethinking Disability in Biblical Studies*. Atlanta: SBL, 2007.

- Black, K. *A Healing Homiletic: Preaching and Disability*. Nashville: Abingdon, 1996.
- Blumenthal, David R. *Facing the Abusing God: A Theology of Protest*. Louisville, KY: WJK, 1993.
- Brock, Brian, and John Swinton, eds. *Disability in the Christian Tradition: A Reader*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012.
- Creamer, Deborah Beth. *Disability and Christian Theology: Embodied Limits and Constructive Possibilities*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009.
- Davis, Lennard J. *The Disability Studies Reader*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. NY: Routledge, 2006.
- Eiesland, Nancy L. *The Disabled God: Towards a Liberatory Theology of Disability*. Nashville: Abingdon, 1994.
- Eiesland, Nancy L., and Don E. Saliers, eds. *Human Disability and the Service of God: Reassessing Religious Practice*. Nashville: Abingdon, 1998.
- Gillibrand, John. *Disabled Church – Disabled Society: The Implications of Autism for Philosophy, Theology and Politics*. London: Jessica Kingsley, 2010.
- Gosbell, Louise A. *The Poor, the Crippled, the Blind, and the Lame: Physical and Sensory Disability in the Gospels of the New Testament*. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2018.
- Henriksen, Jan-Olav, and Karl Olav Sandnes. *Jesus as Healer: A Gospel for the Body*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2016.
- Lawrence, Louise J. *Sense and Stigma in the Gospels: Depictions of Sensory-Disabled Characters*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013.
- . *Bible and Bedlam: Madness, Sanism, and New Testament Interpretation*. LNTS 594. London: T&T Clark, 2018.
- Melcher, Sarah J., Mikeal C. Parsons, and Amos Yong, eds. *The Bible and Disability: A Commentary*. Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2017.
- Moss, Candida R., and Jeremy Schipper, eds. *Disability Studies and Biblical Literature*. NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011. [E-book available at <https://library.mcmaster.ca>]
- Olyan, Saul M. *Disability in the Hebrew Bible: Interpreting Mental and Physical Differences*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008.
- Pilch, John J. *Healing in the New Testament: Insights from Medical and Mediterranean Anthropology*. Minneapolis: Fortress, 2000.

Raphael, Rebecca. *Biblical Corpora: Representations of Disability in Hebrew Biblical Literature*. Library of Hebrew Bible/Old Testament Studies 445. NY: T&T Clark, 2008.

Solevåg, Anna Rebecca. *Negotiating the Disabled Body: Representations of Disability in Early Christian Texts*. Atlanta: SBL, 2018.

Swinton, John. *Critical Reflections on Stanley Hauerwas' Theology of Disability: Disabling Society, Enabling Theology*. NY: Routledge, 2005.

Wilson, Walter T. *Healing in the Gospel of Matthew: Reflections on Method and Ministry*. Minneapolis: Fortress, 2014.

Yong, Amos. *The Bible, Disability, and the Church: A New Vision of the People of God*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2011.

———. *Theology and Down Syndrome: Reimagining Disability in Late Modernity*. Waco: Baylor University Press, 2007.

## **INTERACTION WITH THE PROFESSOR**

The professor will be available via email, Skype/WebEx/Zoom and the discussion forum on Avenue to Learn. Students are expected to come to all classes. Extra meetings can be arranged if a student needs to meet outside of office hours. It is recommended that the student participate regularly in the online discussion forum so as to facilitate the development of a collaborative learning community.

## **CLASSROOM BEHAVIOUR**

The following guidelines are presented to encourage all students to participate together in this course, and should be kept in mind at all times.

1. Please respect the opinions of others, even if you do not agree with them. Extend courtesy by not ridiculing others' ideas, but feel free to respond to them logically and critically and in an orderly manner.
2. Students should be on time to class and stay for the entire class session, unless arranged in advance.
3. Students are not to carry on private conversations in class. If something is unclear, the whole class will benefit by a question being asked out loud.
4. Cell phones and related devices are to be silenced during class. If a student must for some reason accept a phone call, he or she ought to discretely leave the class in order to do so.

Students who fail to respect these guidelines will be dismissed from the class, with all of the consequences implied.

## **LATE SUBMISSION POLICY**

All assignments must be submitted on or before the date due, unless other arrangements are made in advance. A late penalty of 2% per day will be applied to all assignments submitted after the deadline, unless an extension has been obtained from the instructor prior to the deadline. Assignments cannot be submitted after **April 10, 2020** without written permission from the Office of the Registrar ([thomn@mcmaster.ca](mailto:thomn@mcmaster.ca)).

## ACADEMIC HONESTY

Academic dishonesty is a serious offence that may take any number of forms, including plagiarism, the submission of work that is not one's own or for which previous credit has been obtained, and/or unauthorized collaboration with other students. Academic dishonesty can result in severe consequences, e.g., failure of the assignment, failure of the course, a notation on one's academic transcript, and/or suspension or expulsion from the College. Students are responsible for understanding what constitutes academic dishonesty. Please refer to the Divinity College Statement on Academic Honesty ~ <https://www.mcmasterdivinity.ca/programs/rules-regulations>.

In this course we will be using a web-based service ([turnitin.com](https://turnitin.com)) for plagiarism detection. Students who do not wish to submit their work to [turnitin.com](https://turnitin.com) can submit an electronic copy of their work via email in PDF format. All submitted work is subject to normal verification standards in order to ensure that academic integrity has been upheld (e.g. online search).

## GENDER INCLUSIVE LANGUAGE

McMaster Divinity College uses inclusive language for human beings in worship services, student written materials, and all of its publications. It is expected that inclusive language will be used in chapel services and all MDC assignments. In reference to biblical texts, the integrity of the original expressions and the names of God should be respected, but you will need to use gender-inclusive language for humans, and you will need to quote from a gender-inclusive version such as the following: NRSV (1989), NCV (1991), TEV/GNB/GNT (1992), CEV (1995), NLT (1996), TNIV (2005), and the Common English Bible (CEB 2011).

## STYLE

All stylistic considerations (including but not limited to questions of formatting, footnotes, and bibliographic references) must conform to the McMaster Divinity College Style Guidelines for Essays and Theses <http://mcmasterdivinity.ca/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/mdcstyleguide.pdf> Failure to observe appropriate form will result in grade reductions.

## DISCLAIMER

This syllabus is the property of the instructor and is prepared with currently available information. The instructor reserves the right to make changes and revisions up to and including the first day of class.