

NT 3XD3/5XD5/6XD6
“The Indispensable Parts of the Church”
Disability Studies and the Bible

Winter 2023
In-Person and Live-Streaming
Monday 11:00am–12:50pm

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Office Hours: By Appointment

COURSE DESCRIPTION

“Those parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable” (1 Cor 12:22).

Imagine starting a discussion of Christian ecclesiology with these words of the Apostle Paul! What 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 “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), exiled from the city (2 Sam 5:8), and used as a plot device for making larger theological points (such as John 5 and 9). These portrayals of disability raise not only exegetical concerns but also homiletical and pastoral ones in the contemporary faith communities.

This course is an exegetical study of biblical texts that portray (and sometimes stigmatize) disability and the impaired 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 to question the problematic texts and to reflect together on the pastoral implications of such literature. We will also examine a few instances in the Bible where people with disabilities were chosen and called to lead by God but their condition/impairment were not “healed” (let’s call them “the indispensables”). Our goal is to work collaboratively towards a biblical theological understanding of disability.

Delivery Format

This course is offered as an in-person course with live-streaming option. For those who can come to class in-person, our preference is for them to attend in-person. Students will need to declare their preference of attendance at the time of registration. Switching between in-person and live-streaming after registration is allowed but not encouraged. An online forum will be set up on Avenue to Learn (A2L) to facilitate a collaborative learning environment. Students are also encouraged to make an appointment with the instructor 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 settings 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.

DPT/MA/PhD Students

DPT/MA/PhD students who wish to apply for this course as an elective (6-level for MA/PhD, 5-level for DPT) 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 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.

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 (highly recommended):

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. Other book services may also carry the texts.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

Students are required to complete all 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. Weekly Readings and Class Participations (5%)

Each week, students are also required to read sections of the textbook (Yong, 2011) or readings posted by the instructor on A2L. They should **indicate** on A2L whether they have finished all the assigned reading (or give a percentage) at the end of the term. Students should come to class having read the assigned readings in its entirety and should be prepared to contribute to class discussions. The overall grade for this requirement will be determined by both the student's reading and his or her participation in class discussions.

2. Cultural Artefacts (20%)

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) at least **THREE** days before our **February 6 class meeting**. 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 class (Feb 6) 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.

3. Specialization Book Report (25%)

Students are required to choose one book from the following list, read it thoroughly, 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 should be at least 1000-1200 words long (4-5 pages) and must follow the “MDC Style Guidelines for Essays and Theses.” It is due at 11:59 pm on **Feb 27**.

Fox, Bethany McKinney. *Disability and the Way of Jesus: Holistic Healing in the Gospels and the Church*. Downer Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2019.

Hardwick, Lamar. *Disability and the Church: A Vision for Diversity and Inclusion*. Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2021.

Kenny, Amy. *My Body is not a Prayer Request: Disability Justice in the Church*. Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2022.

Questions:

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

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

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

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

4. Specialization Project (35%)

Teaching Lesson Plan (Biblical Studies): Students are to prepare a 4-week Bible study/Sunday School lesson plan that implements your approach or methodology for exploring disability in relation to the Bible. Your work must show integration of what you have learned in this course (readings, lectures, and discussions). The goal of this lessons is to help all participants to formulate their own biblical theology of disability by carefully examining the historical and culture contexts of a few key biblical texts that are representative of different (or contrasting) portrayals and evaluations of disability and people with disabilities. A report with all relevant material (selected passages, exegetical issues, summary of the lesson, prepping resources, discussion questions and brief answers, applications and illustrations, etc.)

is due on **March 27** (11:59pm). The report should include the main theme/emphasis of the lessons and the rationale for including the chosen resources and arrangements. The report, excluding the material, should be 8-10 pages long.

Disability Awareness Sunday (Pastoral Studies). Students in the pastoral studies 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.) is due on **March 27** (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 8-10 pages long.

Disability Ministry Proposal (Church and Culture and Christian Worldview). Student in the CC and CW specializations are to write a proposal for a disability ministry. The goal of this exercise is to help students to put the topics and discussions from the course into a specific application. Students can take the form of something relevant to their own church context. Examples include a community action plan for outreach to families with disabilities; formal presentation for fundings for a specific accessibility requirement; analysis of the accessibility of your congregation or community and a proposal for improvement, etc. Students are welcome to discuss their own project ideas with the professor. A report with all relevant material is due on **March 27** (11:59pm). The report should include the main theme/emphasis of the proposal. The report, excluding the material, should be 8-10 pages long.

5. Reflective Paper (15%).

Write a 3–4 pages paper focusing on your reflection of disability in relation to theology, the Bible, and the church. Integrating in-class lectures, discussions, and weekly readings, your final paper should answer the following questions:

1. Where are people with special needs on Sundays and why do you think they are (or are not) in our churches?
2. At this point in your spiritual journey, how do you understand the various biblical portrayals of disability, the disabled body, and people with disability?
3. What is the relation between disability and sin? How does your answer inform or challenge the way you foster fellowship with (and minister to) people with disabilities?
4. How do we, as part of a believing community, welcome people with disabilities to our midst? Which story with God are they living and telling among us?

The paper is due before our last class meeting on **April 3** (11:00am).

Grading Summary:

1. Readings and Participations	5%
2. Cultural Artefacts	20%
3. Specialization Book Report	25%
4. Specialization Project	35%
<u>5. Reflective Paper</u>	<u>15%</u>
Total:	100%

COURSE SCHEDULE (TENTATIVE)

Date	Topic	Assignment
Jan 9	Disability Studies and the Bible: Preliminary theoretical considerations	
Jan 16	Models of Disability Studies Disability and the Church: A History	
Jan 23	Disability and Health Care in Antiquity: Ancient Mesopotamian and Greco-Roman Cultures	
Jan 30	Types of Disabilities in the Bible (Cognitive, Sensory and Mobility, Sexual and Reproductive, etc.)	
Feb 6	Biblical Theology: A Discussion of Methods <i>Cultural Artefacts Presentations</i>	Cultural Artefacts Due
Feb 13	A Biblical Theology of Disability (I): Disability and the Torah	
Feb 20	Family Day – No Class	
Feb 27	Intensive Hybrid Week – Asynchronous Week Disability and Metaphors	Book Report Due
Mar 6	A Biblical Theology of Disability (II): Disability and the Biblical Narratives	
Mar 13	A Biblical Theology of Disability (III): Disability and the Gospels	

Mar 20	A Biblical Theology of Disability (IV): Disability and Eschatology	
Mar 27	Disability and the Church Healing, Miracle, and Disability (contemporary context) Disability and the Body of Christ	Final Project Due
April 3	Towards a Biblical Theology of Disability	Reflective Paper Due

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.
- Abrams, Judith Z. and William C. Gaventa, eds. *Jewish Perspectives on Theology and the Human Experience of Disability*. Binghamton, NY: Haworth Pastoral Press, 2006.
- 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.
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- Davis, Lennard J. *The Disability Studies Reader*. 2nd 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.
- Marx, Tzvi C. *Disability in Jewish Law*. New York: Routledge, 2002.
- 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.
- Parsons, Mikeal C. *Body and Character in Luke and Acts: The Subversion of Physiognomy in Early Christianity*. Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2011.
- 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.
- Schellenberg, Annette, and Thomas Krüger, eds. *Sounding Sensory Profiles in the Ancient Near East*. Atlanta, GA: SBL Press, 2019.
- Solevåg, Anna Rebecca. *Negotiating the Disabled Body: Representations of Disability in Early Christian Texts*. Atlanta: SBL, 2018.
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- 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.

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.

ONLINE CLASSROOM ETIQUETTE

Students who opt to take this course via live streaming (zoom meeting) are expected to follow these guidelines:

1. Please choose a location that allows you to attend class with the least amount of (expected) distractions and interruptions. A busy café, for example, may not be the best environment for you to participate in various class activities.
2. You are responsible for a device that meets the recommended requirements of running zoom smoothly and have a fast and reliable internet connection for the meeting.
3. Anything that is considered as inappropriate to do in class in person should also be considered as not appropriate during live-streaming class.
4. Please keep your video on as much as it is possible to foster a lively collaborative learning environment.
5. Please mute your microphone during class unless you have a question or when participating in a class/group discussion.

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, 2023** without written permission from the Office of the Registrar (strickpd@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) for plagiarism detection. Students who do not wish to submit their work to 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 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 <https://mcmasterdivinity.ca/resources-forms/mdc-style-guide/>. 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.