

LAMAR
HARDWICK

**DISABILITY
AND THE
CHURCH**



**A VISION FOR
DIVERSITY AND
INCLUSION**



InterVarsity Press
ivpress.com

Taken from *Disability and the Church: A Vision for Diversity and Inclusion*
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Published by InterVarsity Press, Downers Grove, IL. www.ivpress.com.

ONE

BORN THIS WAY

In December of 2015, the television network A&E released a groundbreaking reality show titled *Born This Way*. The show followed the lives of seven young adults born with Down syndrome as they pursued their interests, passions, and dreams, as well as relationships and romance. One of the beauties of this series was that it aired the lives of disabled adults on mainstream media, revealing the true-to-life struggles and successes of those living with disabilities as well as those of their families, friends, and loved ones who support them.

Born This Way was the winner of the 2016 Emmy Award for Outstanding Unstructured Reality Program, and it also went on to win the 2017 Emmy Award for Outstanding Cinematography for a Reality Program, as well as Outstanding Casting for a Reality Program. In 2018, the show was awarded the Critics' Choice Award for Best Unstructured Reality Show. *Born This Way* is arguably one of the most excellent recent pieces of work that has successfully placed the conversation of disability and inclusion front and center in American mainstream pop culture.

One of the most intriguing aspects of the show is the title itself, *Born This Way*. Dr. Christena Cleveland, a social psychologist and award-winning researcher, shares the importance of language in shaping perception in her book *Disunity in Christ*:

Language powerfully shapes the way we think of ourselves.

In the same way that my colleagues and I use language to shape the identity of the participants in our experiments, we can use it to reshape our perceptions of ourselves and other groups in the body of Christ.¹

Perhaps this is why the Christian faith utilizes the language of beginnings extremely well. One of the primary and possibly most predominant themes in the Christian faith is of birth or beginnings. Among the many important and influential images in the biblical text stands the imagery of beginnings, better beginnings, and an opportunity to be born again.

Like many faith traditions, Christianity has a large focus on origin. Understanding the beginnings shapes and structures belief. Faith requires a foundation, and starting in the right place helps to keep us on the right path.

The Bible begins with the story of God's creation of the world and of humanity, providing a foundation for the Christian faith and an understanding of God's purpose and promise for his prized creation.

One can only imagine the amount of creativity it took for God to develop time, space, and matter—to create things such as land, rivers and oceans, stars and moons, plants and animals—all with the intent to prepare the perfect environment for humanity.

In Genesis we see that before God created humanity, he created a place for them to belong. Eden was more than a place on a map; it was an environment created to facilitate relationship. God knew that the human heart needed a place to belong to be fulfilled, because the right environment facilitates the eternal purpose for mankind. God's desire for all is to have a place where we can belong and where our faith journey can begin.

In my book *I Am Strong: The Life and Journey of an Autistic Pastor*, I share the story of one of my earliest experiences of struggling with a need to belong. Growing up in a military family, I always felt a need to belong somewhere. At an early age I learned to surrender to purpose. Our family belonged to something that was larger than our self-interests. Our purpose was to serve our country.

Purpose is powerful and necessary. God gave humanity a purpose when he created us. That purpose was lost when we sinned, but it was restored through Jesus—the hope of all humanity. Every human that God has taken the time to skillfully craft in the womb comes complete with a purpose, a mission if you will, and while that is absolutely true and gives meaning and value to all life, purpose isn't fulfilled in a vacuum—purpose must have a place.

Where we belong in life is just as important as what we do with our lives. God demonstrates this by creating the best environment for us to engage in relationship with him and to live out the hope of his promises. We must have a place to belong.

THE DIVERSITY DILEMMA

Over the last decade, diversity has become one of the biggest buzzwords in our culture. Even more recently, diversity and inclusion have become the battle cry for varying groups of people that have been frantically searching for a home for their hopes and dreams.

All people need a community of hope and help to belong to. While I will make the case that this is a Christian value at its core, everyone has this innate desire to be included, no matter their religious background or faith tradition.

We need to be included in communities that engage our thoughts and emotions in ways that inspire us to reach

our greatest God-given potential for our benefit and the benefit of others in the community.

Even with the rise of the rugged individualism that is so readily apparent in the way we perceive our personal rights and responsibilities, we still hear the faint cry for community in the way we try to connect to others through social media. Despite what we say or even how we periodically behave, we instinctively know at the very core of our finite and fragile human understanding that we can't continue down our path without community.

The rise of diversity and inclusion as core values indicates that we as a culture have settled for the confines of a homogeneous and exclusive community and, in doing so, reduced the very nature and power of living together as one.

This is especially true in the United States. Our lack of appreciation for true community is evident in the way our systems and structures operate. The most obvious example of this issue is the ongoing struggle with race relations in our country.

This book is about diversity and inclusion relating specifically to disability, and the future of Christian faith, particularly as we practice it in the West. With that being said, there is a very particular set of circumstances that must be acknowledged and confronted in order to make the move toward disability-inclusive communities of faith, communities that I believe were demonstrated at the birth of the Christian church.

Over the course of this chapter, I would like to explore those circumstances in hopes that it will provide the church with a clear picture of why our current culture has adopted diversity and inclusion as a banner that I believe belongs in the church. What our culture can teach us about the importance of inclusion should stand as a reminder about the nature of the birth and the building of the Christian church. The diversity

dilemma for Christians in the West must begin with a critical question: Who's missing?

LOST

I hate to lose. I admit it. My family knows this fact about my personality. I have even confessed this to my congregation on multiple occasions in sermons. In fact, when I was a youth pastor, I would often refrain from participating in game time with my students because I knew the risk of me going overboard in my efforts to win. I don't like losing my keys. I don't like losing time on unimportant tasks. Heck, if it weren't for my health, I wouldn't bother losing weight! I think you get the idea.

One might say that this character trait is unbecoming of a pastor; however, there's a good side of my ferocious desire to win that I always equate with the character of God, who I also believe has a distaste for losing. That might be a stretch, but let's look at Jesus' insight on how God handles losing. Jesus tells three very important parables about God's response to losing. Essentially, God just doesn't seem to settle well when things are lost: "Which one of you, having a hundred sheep and losing one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the wilderness and go after the one that is lost until he finds it?" (Luke 15:4).

This parable is the first of a series of stories that Jesus tells about God's affinity for lost things. In this story, Jesus likens God to a shepherd who is willing to pursue one missing sheep out of a flock of one hundred. "He notices the single missing sheep among the ninety-nine in the wilderness. For him, the missing sheep, whether it is one of a hundred or a million, makes the flock incomplete."²

This parable demonstrates God's unique understanding of community, one that we may have lost an appreciation of.

When Jesus tells this story, his audience likely has no frame of reference for owning or even managing one hundred sheep. In his typical storytelling fashion, Jesus uses hyperbole and exaggeration to make his point.

The lost sheep is just one of a hundred that the shepherd is responsible for. Since Jesus only mentions one shepherd, the chances of even noticing that one little sheep is missing is highly unlikely. Maybe that is one of the main points of the parable. Think about what the audience may have been thinking when they heard that one shepherd had a hundred sheep.

The audience hearing this parable was most likely poor or at least not wealthy enough to own a hundred sheep. From the onset of this parable, Jesus grabs the attention of his listeners by suggesting that there is a reality that exists outside their personal experience. Asking them to weigh in on a situation that most of them would never be able to experience suggests that they sit up and pay attention because the purpose of this story will be missed if they blink.

We all tend to think we know what God is saying. When we are not careful, we will craft a monopoly on God and the application of our faith in God because we tend to unconsciously lean solely on our own experience. Jesus won't let us get away with that. He starts the story in a place where most can't predict what's coming next because the notion that someone could afford that many sheep is so far outside the listeners' experience that we have to wonder what Jesus is really saying.

When it comes to diversity and disability, the place to begin is where we allow our imaginations to be filled with a sense of wonder about what Jesus is going to say next in the story about finding a lost sheep. When is the last time we wondered about what Jesus might be up to? When is the last time the church universal allowed the words of Christ to coax us into seeing the story he is telling from a perspective that is perhaps

completely unfamiliar to our own experience? This is the foundation of this story. Jesus invites us to be invested in a story that doesn't start with our experience and makes us examine our own perspective.

The story supposes that the person who owned the sheep is a person of considerable resources, and by placing the shepherd in a different status from the listeners, Jesus forces the listeners to understand themselves in a new light. Whether or not we realize it, we often need something to ignite a flame or passion for understanding the perspectives of others. The truth is, the very first thing we often think about when it comes to life experiences is our own story and our own experience. And if we are not careful, we can unknowingly dismiss and become distant from the experiences of others. Jesus knows this when telling stories about lost things. The story never allows us to settle on what we think about ourselves. Instead Jesus presents a puzzling perspective on how God sees people.

What makes the story so compelling is that while few, if any, of the original audience would have known what it was like to have the resources to own a hundred sheep, no one who had such resources would bother over the loss of just one sheep. It is simply too risky to leave behind ninety-nine to search for one when someone with those means could easily just acquire another sheep. Why care so much about something that is replaceable?

If we are to follow the breadcrumbs that Jesus so masterfully lays before us, we will find that we are being led away from self-focus and toward a mission to find those who are missing from our community. When we answer the question, *Who's missing?* we find our mission.

The beauty of this breathtaking view of God is that God places an extremely high value on the individual lives of each

person he created. For the shepherd, a flock is not a complete community without the unique contribution and presence of each individually important sheep. Each has a value so great that God is willing to risk it all to recover it.

The message of the cross and the mission of Jesus is one that communicates that everyone is important and significant in the eyes of God. No one is a nobody. Every sheep matters, and when even one is not an active part of the community, the alarm must be sounded, and the search must begin. Amy Jill Levine elaborates,

He (the shepherd) engages in an exaggerated search, and when he has found the sheep, he engages in an equally exaggerated sense of rejoicing, first by himself and then with his friends and neighbors. If this fellow can experience such joy in finding one of a hundred sheep, what joy do we experience when we find what we have lost? More, if he can realize that one of his hundred has gone missing, do we know what or whom we have lost? When was the last time we took stock, or counted up who was present rather than simply counted on their presence?³

The story of the lost sheep never gives us insight into the thoughts of the ninety-nine, but I often wonder if they even realized that one of them was missing. Were they alarmed? Were they afraid for their friend? Or were they merely living life as though nothing was lost?

Perhaps what Jesus has done to his audience is to show his hearers that no matter how comfortable we have become with running the numbers and calculating the cost of a rescue mission, the shepherd who sees each individual as invaluable will spare no expense in scouring the earth for just one; he will risk all in order to accomplish his mission.

The diversity discussion begins by asking questions about who's missing from our communities, our classrooms, our boardrooms, and most importantly our churches. Next, we need to ask, where are they? Where are the people who don't look like us, and how can we place them at the center of the story and raise our sense of awareness about the lives they live and the value they have in the eyes of God? How can the church dive headfirst into the responsibility of creating communities where missing sheep are valued and pursued with the same passion and persistence as the wealthy-but-risk-taking shepherd? What effort can the church make to ensure that their community is not comfortable with being insensitive, ineffective, and incomplete?

DEFINING DIVERSITY

The tide of our culture is changing rapidly, and many minority groups are challenging the status quo by claiming their stake in the promise for progress and potential for all people.

Diversity by definition simply means the active and intentional inclusion of variety, yet over the years this issue has taken on several specific applications. In the United States, the issue of diversity, or the lack of it, can be rooted in the history of how the country was created. It is no secret that the origins of the nation were deeply rooted in slavery, racism, and segregation.

While the primary focus of this book is not on racial and ethnic diversity, we must spend time where the diversity discussion begins. Then disability will be brought into the discussion of diversity, as well as why the church must be on the front lines of leading and shaping the discussion of diversity and disability.

Diversity and the struggle to contend for its existence is not a new issue. In fact, the lack of diversity is a natural human response to difference. Recognizing differences is not a negative thing in itself. Instead, the inability or unwillingness to acknowledge the construction of community based on sameness has a subtly sinful way of creating indifference toward those who are different.

We tend to group things according to sameness for two primary reasons. Sameness is simple, and sameness is safe. One can easily observe this in science. We categorize plants, animals, and the like into categories because it is simply easier to understand things that are similar. To categorize is to make things less complicated, which in turn ensures that we have to spend less cognitive energy learning new things. Christena Cleveland refers to this phenomenon as “cognitive laziness.”⁴ Again, categorizing is not inherently bad; however, when we reduce our relational connections with people to categories of neatly packaged communities based on similarities, we miss God’s goal for human interaction. We miss the point, and we start missing people.

The other reason that we tend to categorize is because sameness symbolizes safety. When we presume to know what a group is like, we don’t reach true understanding. We tend to believe that we can control our experiences with that group and our expectations of that group. The search for safety can often actually lead to the danger of dehumanizing groups that are not like us. It is ironic that our need to feel safe in and among differing groups is itself a subtle form of violence against the groups that we often fear will be violent toward us.

Diversity, then, is more than desegregation; diversity is rooted in full integration. The difference between the two is as distinct as merely being allowed in versus being wholeheartedly included. The outcome of true diversity is found in

the ability to create something new that complements the unique contributions of all groups and their distinct differences, without modification, so that the newly formed group is at full strength and full capacity to live out the truths of Christ-centered community.

BIBLICAL DIVERSITY

Biblical diversity is by no means an easy task. In fact, the successful creation of community forged from two or more distinct groups is not natural; it is supernatural.

For Christ himself has brought peace to us. He united Jews and Gentiles into one people when, in his own body on the cross, he broke down the wall of hostility that separated us. He did this by ending the system of law with its commandments and regulations. He made peace between Jews and Gentiles by creating in himself one new people from the two groups. Together as one body, Christ reconciled both groups to God by means of his death on the cross, and our hostility toward each other was put to death. (Ephesians 2:14-16 NLT)

A brief examination of diversity in the biblical text shows that the power needed to achieve true diversity does not reside with humanity but rather with its Creator. The apostle Paul provides a powerful image of the work of the cross in this passage, which describes how Jesus heals division and brings together diverse people groups.

Let's briefly examine what I believe are the five key components of a prescription for and a description of biblical diversity: peace, unity, individuality, reconciliation, and sacrifice. We will return to these ideas and concepts later in the book as we learn how we can take actionable steps toward creating diversity in the local church.

Peace. The peace of which Paul speaks extends beyond a personal peace; the core of the peace that Christ promotes through his death on the cross is also a state of peace between people groups united in him. This is an extremely important aspect of defining diversity because it places the priority of community at the center of the Christian life. Peace is not the absence of differences but rather the presence of a united community despite the differences. Communion with God and with one another has always been the aim of the restoration of God's original plan for creation. God created the very concept of community, and the bearers of his image are designed to reflect the beauty of oneness.

One of the primary reasons that diversity is such a struggle is because of the ravaging damages of sin. Sin not only separated humanity from God, but it also fractured humanity—separating people and people groups. The human condition is one of worrying, wondering, and wandering through life, desperately trying to determine the scope and meaning of our lives outside God's original plan. This kind of life involves no real peace. We are utterly unable to live a life of peace with God and with one another apart from God's plan for restoration and reconciliation. When Paul says that peace was given to us, he points out that we do not possess the power to produce peace within ourselves.

In his writing to the Ephesian church, Paul describes a situation that is strikingly similar to our own. Jews and Gentiles (non-Jewish people) were in conflict with one another. If peace had been possible, it would not have required the cross. Likewise, true diversity and true inclusion is not possible without the cross. It is in the unified body of the triune Godhead that peace is found. Diversity reflects divinity, and the peace needed to achieve it is not just personal—it is communal.

Unity. Unity presupposes equality. In his instruction and encouragement to the Ephesian church, Paul is careful to remind the Gentile Christians that their inclusion in the church and the kingdom of God is not based on merit. Grace is the source of their salvation and, like the Jewish followers of Jesus, they were in need of God’s grace.

“Don’t forget that you Gentiles used to be outsiders” (Ephesians 2:11 NLT).

As Jesus did when he told the story of the lost sheep, Paul is making certain that they remember what it is like to not be the center of the story. Diversity demands equality. Equality is the foundation for unity. The gift of grace is that it positions all races, ethnicities, cultures, and people with various conditions at the foot of the cross. We are all sinners and our greatest need is a shared one. No matter how different we are, we are in the same need of the gospel.

In the Gospel of John, Jesus’ prayer for our unity is recorded: “I pray that they will all be one, just as you and I are one—as you are in me, Father, and I am in you. And may they be in us so that the world will believe you sent me” (John 17:21 NLT).

Equality is necessary for the gospel to be taken seriously. We cannot seek diversity without unity, and we cannot seek unity without equality. Two or more groups are not really integrated or united when all groups are not appreciated for their true value and worth in the eyes of God. Without this, the gospel becomes distorted. In his book *The Myth of Equality*, author and pastor Ken Wytsma explains the need for Christ-centered equality:

Theologically, our division—or lack of unity in diversity—is not accidental, minor, or of secondary concern. God cannot fully be known until we find ways to be one with each other and to come as one united church to the Lord’s

Supper. Only in Christ do we see that the call to full unity in our beautiful and God-given diversity is necessary and central to our individual and collective program of being found with and in God.⁵

Individuality. Distinction is the measure of diversity. A group cannot define itself as truly diverse unless each person's individual identity is allowed to stay intact. God's plan for the church was never to erode the distinctions between people groups; rather, Paul states that Jesus in his death destroys the wall of hostility between them. In essence, individuality is as important to diversity as unity. The ability to achieve unity without uniformity is what makes the power of the cross credible. As pastor and author John Ortberg states in his book *The Me I Want to Be*, "God is not trying to replace you, God is trying to redeem you."⁶

Individuality must be preserved at all costs on the path to diversity. Paul reminds the Ephesian church that in the process of tearing down walls of hostility, God preserves the beauty of individual and group identity by allowing distinct languages, cultures, ideas, expressions of worship, and preferences to remain as unique identifiers that display God's wisdom. "God's purpose in all this was to use the church to display his wisdom in its rich variety to all the unseen rulers and authorities in the heavenly places" (Ephesians 3:10 NLT).

As the church, it is our duty and pleasure to help people be who God created them to be. God's plan for his church was to create a community where distinction could be displayed without reservation—a plan of unity with diversity. The variety of colors, cultures, and conditions is even found on display in John's revelation of eternal worship in heaven. "After this I saw a vast crowd, too great to count, from every nation and tribe and people and language, standing in front of the throne and before the Lamb" (Revelation 7:9 NLT).

In this beautiful image of worship, John clearly shows that every distinct culture that God created remains, even in heaven. Unified worship of God doesn't require the loss of distinction.

Reconciliation. When it comes to diversity, understanding true biblical reconciliation is extremely important. In Paul's words to the Ephesian Christian community, reconciliation comes as a result of Christ's death on the cross. In Christ's death, Paul says that the hostility between Jews and Gentiles was put to death.

Reconciliation in this context is defined as "an exchange." This is key to understanding diversity. Reconciliation must extend beyond remorse for inappropriate behavior. Forgiveness must be addressed, and offending parties must repent and seek to make restitution; however, reconciliation is not about the change of behavior as much as it is about the exchange of lives. Life change happens when life is exchanged.

Diversity can only be truly achieved when distinct peoples or groups are truly willing to live close to one another in ways that promote the exchange of ideas, perspectives, cultures, and values. This can only happen when each group involved has the conviction that they can receive something of value from those outside their own context and culture.

In Christ and his death are the ultimate means for reconciliation. His death shows his high value for all human life. Through him is the exchange of life that leads to God. Diversity includes an exchange of life that points to the gift and grace of God through Jesus Christ.

Sacrifice. The vehicle for diversity is always death. Christ paved the way and gave us the prescription for breaking down the barriers that sin has built up between us. Paul explains how reconciliation takes place by death, but not just any death, death on the cross.

One of the greatest mysteries of the Christian faith is the theology of oneness. Whether discussing marriage or ministry or our triune God, the biblical authors seem to believe that oneness is an expectation for followers of Jesus. Mathematically speaking, two becoming one is impossible. Spiritually speaking, the only way that different people and different groups who have different experiences and different perspectives can become one is when everyone involved is deeply committed to sacrificing for the cause of creating a new community.

Sacrifice is often thought of in terms of subtracting. Many resist sacrifice because we believe that sacrifice is the process of unwillingly shedding something out of necessity. Sacrifice is one of those words that has shouldered the burden of being the unwanted virtue of character development, especially in the Christian faith.

Because of this limited perspective of sacrifice, we have often celebrated it only when we can demonstrate that the shedding or separation from an activity or a relationship has led to other more desirable benefits. We sacrifice family time to work longer hours. We sacrifice time with God for other relational pursuits. We sacrifice financing one thing for another, all with the intent of gaining a desirable outcome.

The type of sacrifice that Paul is speaking about—the type that destroys walls and makes diversity possible—is the type of sacrifice that *adds*, not subtracts. Jesus took on the cross and gained for us salvation. Jesus took on our sin and restored our relationship with God. Jesus added the shame and suffering that is synonymous with the cross, and unlike sacrifice by subtraction, his sacrifice was aimed at adding us to his heavenly roster.

For the sake of diversity, sacrifice by addition means being intentional and willing to take on the burden of learning and appreciating the lives and experiences of those who are most

unlike us. The type of sacrifice needed to create diversity is the form of sacrifice that depends on faith in Jesus and the power of his resurrection in repairing the faulty foundation of self-sufficiency. Adding the lessons and life experiences of others to mine is an act of faith that says my thoughts, my life, my experiences, my community are not complete without adding the voices of others who can complement how I was created. There is sacrifice in achieving diversity, but it makes everyone stronger.

BORN THIS WAY

For too long, many in the Church have argued that unity in the body of Christ across ethnic and class lines is a separate issue from the gospel. There has been the suggestion that we can be reconciled to God without being reconciled to our brothers and sisters in Christ. Scripture doesn't bear that out.—Dr. John M. Perkins⁷

In the United States of America, the Christianity that we profess and practice is in a constant wrestling match with diversity because it was born with the voices of minorities missing from the conversations that framed the foundation of the nation.

“We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.”⁸ The tension between the ideal communicated in these words and the lived experience of these words continues to exist. Ironically the framers of these ideals were themselves contributors to the barriers that made equality impossible.

Although we have struggled through a complicated and often criminal treatment of people of color and people with

disabilities, we have a good road map. Equality is the ideal, and that calls for diversity. This explains the rise of so many groups demanding it.

As our nation has grown and matured and continued advancing, we have come to a crossroads where we have been forced to acknowledge that we are far from reaching the ideals of equality, inclusion, and diversity, and yet we have a bright future if we embrace the path to diversity.

THE CHURCH WAS BORN FOR INCLUSION

The church must take the lead in the discussion of diversity and ultimately disability. It is not only a directive found in the teachings of Jesus, it is the description of the very DNA that gave birth to the church.

Examine the following Scripture passage:

“Who do people say that the Son of Man is?”

“Well,” they replied, “some say John the Baptist, some say Elijah, and others say Jeremiah or one of the other prophets.”

Then he asked them, “But who do you say I am?”

Simon Peter answered, “You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God.”

Jesus replied, “You are blessed, Simon son of John, because my Father in heaven has revealed this to you. You did not learn this from any human being.”
(Matthew 16:13-17 NLT)

What he says next is astounding. Pay close attention to the words Jesus speaks in response to Peter’s revelation of his identity. It is a description of why the church was born. And if the church can grasp what was said in this moment, the church will become a leader in the diversity conversation.

Now I say to you that you are Peter (which means “rock”) and upon this rock I will build my church, and all the powers of hell will not conquer it. And I will give you the keys of the Kingdom of Heaven. (Matthew 16:18-19 NLT, emphasis added)

Keys symbolize access. When Jesus announced his intention to create a gathering of his followers, he framed the birth of his kingdom with the expressed intent of inclusion. The church was born to give humanity access to God’s kingdom, a kingdom whose ethics and ideals are not only inclusive but eternal.

The church is needed during this season when there is an increased public demand for diversity and inclusion. Jesus did not offer a plan B; he did not give the keys to any other organization. Jesus is not depending on other agencies with alternate ideologies to champion the cause of diversity. The church was born for this.

The church is built for the mission of making disciples by creating a culture of diversity. Since people with disabilities are the largest minority group in the world and the singularly most missed voice in the church, like the framers of the Constitution of the United States, the church must contend for its future by reframing its resolve to live up to the lofty but life-changing ideals that gave birth to its existence.

If you are reading this book, then I trust that you believe in the mission and future of the church and her ability to answer the call of our culture to create communities where all are invited, included, and celebrated.

The next several chapters of this book will serve as a guide and blueprint to build a more inclusive church, one that addresses the need for diversity. In particular, I will be addressing the need for including the disability community. The task is difficult. Both individuals and institutions instinctively resist

change, but the church holds the keys. The church is the gatekeeper to inclusion and diversity, and the mission is worth the work.

There are generally two reasons why people are drawn to books like this one. You may be reading this because you have a heart for creating diverse communities that include people with disabilities, and you're also likely to be reading this because you need help. As a pastor diagnosed with autism, let me both encourage and assure you that even though you may need help in creating a diverse community, if you have the heart, you can make a difference.

You were born for this.

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