

*A Biblical Guide To Understanding
Impairments, Afflictions, & Suffering
Within Today's World*

**BARRIERS
AND
BRIDGES**

by

GEORGE BURGESS

Aadeon Publishing Company
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Barriers and Bridges: A Biblical Guide To Understanding, Impairments, Afflictions, & Suffering Within Today's World

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Introduction

All people at some point in their lives will encounter impairments, afflictions, and suffering—either personally or in the lives of friends and family. Such things have been with us from the earliest days of man and will continue.

Given the nature of the problems we will encounter, it is essential each of us know what the Bible says about this important area of life. Waiting for the moment we or someone we care about encounters such things is the wrong time to learn about them. When faced with times of trouble, when knowledge and strength are necessary, we must be prepared to weather the storm and help others as well.

The pages of this book are dedicated to helping all people better understand the issues, concerns, and wisdom offered through the Bible on this subject.

It is important to note that striving to be sensitive to everyone reading this book is a primary goal of the author. As a result, you will notice terms such as impaired, afflicted, and suffering being used often. These terms are used frequently to avoid using others considered offensive by some people.

This is one of the most important subjects you can read about and share with others. I encourage you to carefully read the book, and share word of it with others. Education is the best way to prepare for times of trouble. Be ready. Be prepared. Help others do likewise!

Dedication

This book is dedicated to those
who struggle daily with impairments,
afflictions and suffering.

Acknowledgment

I would like to thank Carol
for the role she played in
the development of this book.

1 Identity Lost

One arm, one leg, and a single eye? War can be a very trying time for parents. Many live from letter to letter, hoping and praying their soldier, airman, or seaman will survive another day of battle. Such was the case for one couple who had not heard from their son for several months. No letters, phone calls or news caused them to believe the seaman had died in battle.

Then one day the phone rang out and to their amazement their son was on the line. As they spoke, he told them he had failed to write because he had been caring for a fellow sailor who had been injured. He spoke of how the young man had lost an arm, a leg, and an eye as his parents listened with much concern. In time the young man mustered the courage to ask his parents if his friend could come and live with them. He noted the sailor did not have another home to go to.

After some discussion, the seaman's parents told him they felt the burden of caring for such a badly wounded person would be too much for them. As the conversation closed, the seaman expressed his love and told his parents he understood their concerns. The following morning the couple received a telegram

from naval authorities informing them their son had died. The message stated that he had jumped from a window to his death.

The message stunned the parents. They could not understand why their son had reacted as he did. But when the casket arrived and was opened, their son's lifeless body spoke volumes. There he lay, with only one arm, one leg, and a single eye.¹

The Person

The physically impaired—who are they? They are our sons and daughters, our mothers and fathers, our sisters and brothers. They're our grocers, repairmen, teachers, and mayors. Like most people, including the Lord Jesus Himself, each of us at some point in our lives is likely to experience some sort of physical impairment. Whether at birth, during middle age, or in the golden years, impairments are almost inevitable.

As certain as such things are, when we are young and healthy we may fail to empathize with the struggles of the afflicted. For many of us, the physically impaired are less than a passing thought. Of course when we see the impaired, we feel bad for them. We may even stop to politely open a door or two. But beyond that, for most of us the impaired tend to be “out of sight, out of mind.”

In fairness, we need not be cruel, cold-hearted people to display this mentality. All of us by nature tend to focus only on those things that are most relevant to us. Even if something is very relevant, our ability to relate to a foreign experience is limited.

Over the years, I have ministered to many who were physically impaired. I have visited people in poorly run state nursing homes, exclusive retirement estates, hospitals and private homes. This might lead some to believe I am better equipped to relate to the many difficulties the impaired regularly experience. This is not the case. Apart from experiencing such a thing, it is difficult to appreciate the trials they encounter daily. Even those who spend large sums of time with the impaired find it difficult to obtain a deep understanding of their plight.

1. Donald E. Wildmon, “Their Son Came Home,” Tupelo, MS *American Family Association*, (June, 1994): 1.

How do people who are not impaired relate with the endless darkness of the blind, the loss of movement of the lame, the still quietness of the deaf, the weakness of the terminally ill? We cannot relate with their trials. I came to realize this the hard way.

For most of my life I was the picture of health and fitness. I was an accomplished athlete and a member of the elite US Army Rangers. The physical standards and demands set by the Rangers were among the highest in the military. For me, all of this changed one afternoon while inspecting a tree stand. One moment I was securely in a tree, and before I knew it, I lost my balance. I decided to jump to the safety of the moist ground. Unfortunately, instead of hitting the spongy surface, my right foot landed squarely on a large bulging root.

After X-rays had been taken, my surgeon told me I had broken my heel in four places and shattered the joint as well. He said it was one of the most serious breaks a person could incur. To my dismay, in the span of twenty-four short hours, I went from being a healthy, mobile person to someone who would be physically impaired for the rest of his life.

When I contemplated the depth of my injury, I was sickened at the thought. The idea of metal pins and a plate holding the shattered pieces of my foot together was heart breaking. Graciously the Lord did not allow me to dwell on this for long. He reminded me that the outcome could have been much worse. This led me to view my impairment not as a curse, but as an aid to help me better relate with a special group of people.

As a result of the Lord's encouragement, I felt moved to learn about the world of the physically impaired, rather than run from it. As I did, I realized there is a segment of people who regularly face trials I could never have imagined. I began to learn that things most of us take for granted—showers, putting on a pair of pants, using the stairs, etc.—can be major obstacles for some people. Something as basic as turning over while sleeping can be a source of extreme fear and terrible pain.

Through my experience, I came to realize we must strive to be much more sensitive to the plight of the physically impaired. Many of them badly need our help and encouragement; not because they are weak or inferior, but like all of us, they need the support of others.

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The physical loss and emotional trials they face daily can weigh heavily on them. We cannot fully understand their difficulties, but we can certainly try. We must avoid morbidly dwelling on such things, while being as sensitive as possible to their ongoing struggles.

Regardless of man's ability or inability to empathize with the physically impaired, we know the Lord Jesus truly loves them. He proved this during His earthly ministry. Countless times He was found ministering to the physically impaired. Over and over again He was seen healing their feeble bodies. He paid some of them the highest honor by recording their personal stories in the Bible.

If Christ loved the physically impaired so much that He spent time with them, healed them, included them in His Word, and even died for them, then we too must recognize their importance and act accordingly.

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