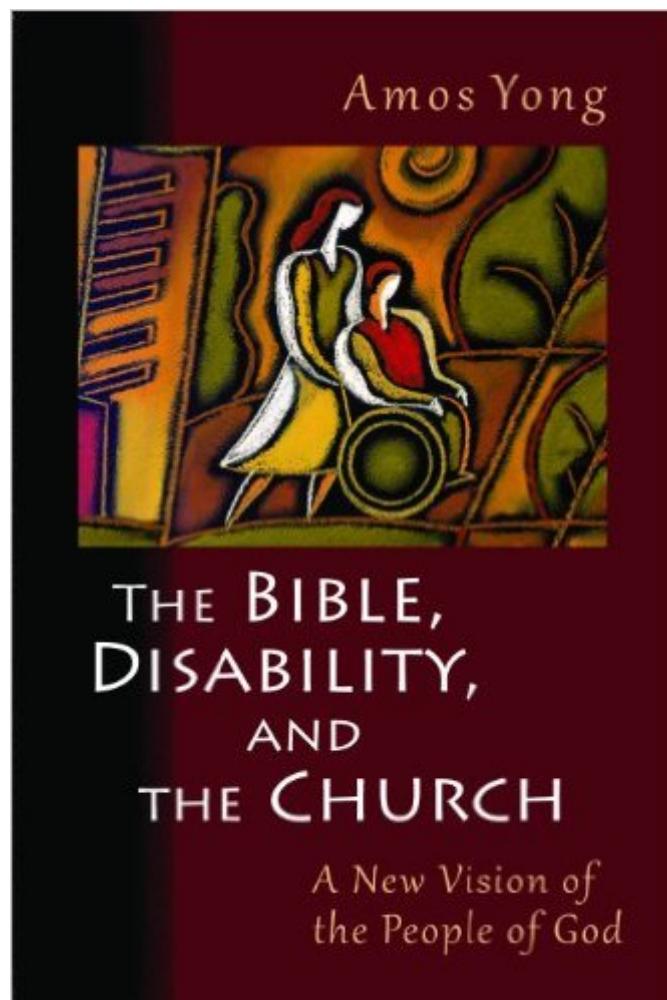


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# The Bible, Disability, And The Church: A New Vision Of The People Of God



## Synopsis

Inspiring and challenging study that rethinks the Bible's teaching on disabilityA theologian whose life experience includes growing up alongside a brother with Down syndrome, Amos Yong in this book rereads and reinterprets biblical texts about human disability, arguing that the way we read biblical texts, not the Bible itself, is what causes us to marginalize persons with disabilities.

Revealing and examining the underlying stigma of disability that exists even in the church, Yong shows how the Bible offers good news to people of all abilities • and he challenges churches to become more inclusive communities of faith.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

"The Bible, Disability, and the Church: A New Vision of the People of God" is the manageable 166 page version of the immense and academic previous work from Yong called "Theology and Down Syndrome: Reimagining Disability in Late Modernity". The latter was printed in 2007 and is 425 pages of a dense, thorough, and academic-styled gem on the Theology of Disability). This latest incarnation of Dr Yong's work distills the 2007 book for a broader audience and also includes useful study guide questions throughout, making it ideal for very meaty small group studies, or spiritual direction and disciple-making. Laypersons may find the writing style (still) quite academic, although Yong identifies this book as meant to be accessible for laity. It's not that elemental. For those who've been through seminary, graduate school, or have read and enjoyed intellectual and challenging writers like N.T. Wright, R.C. Sproul, C.S. Lewis and the like, it won't be overly

challenging. Probably. A refresher on theological terms like ecclesiology, hermeneutics, eschatology, and so forth, will be of use to those less well-read in this way. (For that, I suggest a quick online googling of "glossary of common theological terms" or a book such as this for one's library: A Pocket Dictionary of Theological Terms) This following excerpt encapsulates his main message well: "Re-visioning a theology of disability has weighty ramifications for the contemporary church's encounter with the challenges of the world in our time, particularly if the church is to proclaim and embody good news to all people, especially those with disabilities. I envision a fully inclusive church - at the congregational, parish, community, and missiological levels - to be one in which people with disabilities are honored and in which they are fully ministers alongside non-disabled people." Yong goes into the needed details for how this can happen. It would be my hope that seminaries would make this work required reading for those going into pastoral care and ministry. Disability is not a fringe issue. As the book mentions, "If we live long enough we (ourselves) will encounter disability." Injury, age, accidents, illness, and typical human frailty mean that we are all "temporarily-able bodied". This isn't something to wallow in or ignore, but rather to accept as part of how God is (somehow) working, and how he is redeeming his creation. With 1 out of 5 families effected by disability, an aging population, and huge spike in Autism rates---to name just a few reasons---everyone does or will encounter disability up close. The Church/Christians must be properly acquainted with this issue, and how God would have us do well by his standards, character, and in the mission he has for us in relation to disability and the people he loves (his much varied, much beloved creation). This book is a needed corrective for thinking about God aright.

Additional NOTE: Forthcoming by Feb 2012, video with Dr Yong will be available on youtube channel "NiNJAinterviews" explicating the themes of the book, and tackling some difficult issues he presents. He will provided responses to the following:

1. From the beginning you discuss how "ableism" makes it difficult to have a helpful hermeneutic on disability. Could you briefly explain ableism, and its disadvantages?
2. The hermeneutic of suspicion and the hermeneutic of a "disability reading" that you utilize are not universally appreciated in Christian circles. ( Some are dismissive to this approach...There is a suspicion of a faulty post modern application to the Bible, etc.) Please briefly explain why you use this approach.
3. As you say, many christians have flawed or unhelpful ideas on disability, such as seeing healing as a primary goal; seeing the disabled as 2nd class members of the body, pitiable, or un-whole; and so forth: How do you suggest we move to mitigate this in our churches? Any first steps ideas?
4. I deeply appreciate the portion about lamenting /lamenting prayers. Please tell us why you tapped into them to discuss disability.
5. Which narrative in the Bible do you think is the most useful for re-understanding disability? and Why?
6. You say that

the theme of Light and Darkness in John's gospel has been misunderstood. This may sound shocking to some Christians, so could you explicate this a bit for our viewers? To anyone interested in the topic, consider it a valuable addendum.

Why do churches sometimes try to evade the American Disabilities Act? Does this evasion suggest a lack of concern for persons with disabilities? When it comes to reading Scripture, do we read it in ways that perpetuate stereotypes and stigmas? And does our language exclude rather than include and welcome persons with disabilities? I must admit that until I began reading Amos Yong's book *The Bible, Disability, and the Church* I hadn't thought much about these kinds of questions. Reading this book was a consciousness-raising experience that forced me to look at biblical texts and the church in a very new and different light. As an evangelical Yong has a high view of scripture. It is for him the Word of God and thus needs to be taken seriously. But, he also understands that how we interpret that text has important implications for how we live out the Christian life. Although as a Pentecostal he believes that God heals, he also knows that God is not healing curing everyone or removing the disabilities experienced by people. Thus, perhaps there other ways in which healing occurs - including the removal of stigmas that isolate and exclude persons. Yong's own engagement with how the church views and includes persons with disabilities began early in life, as he helped care for his brother who has Down syndrome. This relationship, together with watching his brother living out his faith fully and enthusiastically, opened his eyes to the way in which persons with disabilities are often viewed in the church. This engagement opened his eyes as well to the fact that persons with disabilities, including people with intellectual disabilities have gifts and charisms to bring to the community of faith. His engagement with his brother and others with disabilities led to his reengaging scripture. We know that there are numerous stories, often healing stories that include persons with disabilities. According to the Gospels, for instance, Jesus heals the lame, the leper, the epileptic, the hemorrhaging woman, persons who were blind and deaf. I myself have interpreted these actions as restoring persons to wholeness, but in making this interpretation, have I stigmatized persons with disabilities as being less than whole? Yong refers to such interpretations as reading the text from a "normate" position. That is, a perspective on the text from the vantage point of what society considers normal or able-bodied. But in helping us look at this question of perspective, we need to look at the language we use. He points out that in our day there are attempts at avoiding discriminatory language. This we use terms like physically challenged to avoid negative connotations, but he chooses to retain the language of disability, in part because it's accessible to most church goers, but in doing so we should avoid the "linguistic trap of reducing

people to their disabilities." But, having said this, disabilities are part of the person. With that in mind he spends time near the end of the book with how we envision the resurrection body. Do we assume that these "disabilities" cease to mark the person? He notes that Down Syndrome is part of who is brother is. In speaking of disability, he includes a wide spectrum of realities, from physical to intellectual. The discussion is complex, but Yong approaches it with grace and sensitivity. His focus is not on why persons have disabilities, but rather on raising our awareness of disabilities so that our churches can be truly inclusive and welcoming. This is a book written for the church, inviting it to think a new about the question of disability. It asks us to consider whether disability is some intrinsic evil that needs to be eliminated, either here on earth or in the age to come? But in writing this word to the church, he focuses his attention on the way we read Scripture. In the course of four chapters, we move from the Old Testament to the gospels, through the letters, and finally to eschatologically focused texts. Yong's attempt to lay out a disability reading of scripture takes its place among other readings of the scripture that seek to liberate those whom society has marginalized. As is true with feminist and liberationist readings, whether Latin American, Asian, or black theology, it reminds us that context matters and vantage point matters. Since most readers and interpreters begin with normate readings, it's important to read the texts anew in the light of the experiences of others. Since this book is well written, thoughtful and accessible, it should find a ready audience in the church. Yong doesn't take an adversarial position, but rather with grace and humility, he invites us to enter the text of scripture and read it with new lenses. The author honors Scripture, even reveres it, and yet he finds ways deconstructing the way it's read. He invites us to experience healing so that we might share in the blessings of fellowship with those we so often consider disabled. Our efforts are enhanced by the inclusion of discussion/Reflection questions at the end of each chapter. Therefore, we have the resources to begin the conversation. Take and read, and be transformed.

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