**One Parent’s Mission with Autism**

This coming Sabbath, April 25, is designated by the General Conference as a day of special emphasis for those with special needs—the annual Possibility Ministries Sabbath, as we prefer it. This day is to improve awareness of and the level of inclusivity of those and their families who live with mental and physical impairments—the blind, the deaf, those with autism, for example, and sometimes feel excluded from mainstream church.

Around one in 100 in Australia are thought to be on the autism spectrum, although recent statistics suggest a rate as high as one in seventy\* and as low as one in 150\*\*. “Autism” describes a lifelong, developmental disability that affects how a person communicates with and relates to other people, and how they experience the world around them. It’s estimated that together with their families, around 2.8 million people’s lives are touched by autism every day.

In the article following, Janelle Victry Pamphile, CEO of HOPEWITHASMILE in the UK, speaks about the daily struggles she has in taking care of her autistic son. There are lessons to be learned from both her experience and our response.

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“It was a very painful time for me and my family at first. My son Madiba was three years old at the time; at the time, he was more judged for his behaviour than his illness. Getting him diagnosed was so stressful, but he was finally diagnosed as a high functioning autistic child. That was the day I dreaded. No one wants to hear their child is autistic.

“Taking him to church was not a pleasant experience at all. At first my son didn’t like to be touched or looked at by people, not even by some of the people he saw daily. Prayer saw us through those difficult times. I just surrendered everything to God and asked Him to take control.”

Today, Janelle believes that “autistic children are amazing.” She says, “At my house you don’t have time to feel guilty; you don’t have time to feel sorry for him, for yourself or your family—it’s time to get down and busy.”

Madiba was diagnosed with autism at five years of age; he was non-verbal at three years, now he can speak fluently. Sadly, there are a lot of children and teenagers who haven’t been diagnosed and all I want to encourage parents to do is to keep pushing. I changed my son’s diet and made him feel important and told him he is such a special part of the family. I also told my husband this wasn’t our fault. Yes! [we have a special needs child and we need to be positive; God is at work!](webextlink://we%20have%20a%20special%20needs%20child%20and%20we%20need%20to%20be%20positive;%20God%20is%20at%20work.)

“I took him to speech therapy and spoke with other parents, and doctors to gather information. I took him swimming and football (his favourite) and his speech improved. I planted a ‘seed’ in my son to believe in God—and himself—and to THINK BIG!

“We have family time around the table when we eat; I would ask everyone in my house to express their feelings and what was bothering them. This opened so many doors, and Madiba would love to share his feelings. As a result, his confidence has increased.

“Hope came in the form of an angel—a sister at my church who is a teacher. Faith—that’s her name—saw something in Madiba and nurtured him into a very calm child using Lego toys. Autistic children are very creative, and my son looked forward to getting his Lego each Sabbath from Aunty Faith. Eventually he would sit during the church service. ‘Look, they marvelled. ‘Look, that little boy is now more peaceful than us’.”

Madiba is now a child ambassador at his school and the mayor of Brent, UK, where they live, thanks his parents for not giving up.

In writing about her experience for this Possibility Ministries Day, Janelle’s goal is simple: “I want to let people know that autistic children are amazing. If we can change the way we think, we can change our lives—and theirs.”

\* https://epicassist.org/1-in-70-australians/  
\*\* Australian Bureau of Statistics

*Adapted, with permission, from the BUC News*