



“Thirteen percent of children ages 8 to 15 have at least one mental disorder, a rate that is comparable to diabetes, asthma, and other diseases of childhood.”

National Institute of Mental Health

# chosen FAMILIES

By Shannon Royce

“The Lord our God, the Lord is One. Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength. These words that I am giving you today are to be in your heart. Repeat them to your children. Talk about them when you sit in your house and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. Bind them as a sign on your hand and let them be a symbol on your forehead. Write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.” *Deuteronomy 6:4-9*

Raising children with a biblical worldview in this day and age is challenging. The culture appears to be racing toward Gomorrah at a breakneck speed. For parents who take the admonition of Deuteronomy 6:4-9 seriously, the work is daunting.

This command is as relevant to modern parents as it was to the children of Israel. We are to steward our children in the ways of the Lord and teach them in the daily moments of life about walking with God, knowing His Word, and sharing Him with others.

Parents raising children with hidden disabilities live with this same biblical admonition. The added challenge for them is walking out this biblical principle while facing the unique realities of their daily lives. They want to teach their children the ways of the Lord, but they often feel alone in their efforts to do so.

The medical community is beginning to understand some of these hidden disabilities—autism spectrum disorder, Asperger’s syndrome, bipolar disorder, obsessive-compulsive disorder, depression, and others—but the church often lags behind in understanding and support.

## Unique challenges

All families living with a disability—whether hidden or obvious—have the unique challenge of accepting the unusual limitations of the child the Lord has given them. There is a grief process in that acceptance that is not even understood by the families (like mine) who have to deal with it constantly. There is a new grief with each reminder of the loss of “normal.”

Key to our acceptance of the hidden disability of our child was the assurance in Psalm 139:13-16: “For it was You who created my inward parts; You knit me together in my mother’s womb. I will praise You, because I have been remarkably and wonderfully made. Your works are wonderful, and I know [this] very well. My bones were not hidden from You when I was made in secret, when I was formed in the depths of the earth. Your eyes saw me when I was formless; all [my] days were written in Your book and planned before a single one of them began.”

Ask any parent of a child with a disability and they will acknowledge the painful reality of loneliness. It is only made more complex when that disability is hidden and unspoken. Old friends may disappear because of the discomfort of dealing with changed family circumstances.

While pondering this passage one day, I was struck that it gives no exceptions. It does not say, “I am fearfully and wonderfully made—unless I have autism,” or “I am fearfully and wonderfully made—unless I have bipolar disorder.” God in His sovereign goodness says through the Psalmist that each one of us is fearfully and wonderfully made. Period. No exceptions. I was convicted that if God said this about any person, who was I to question His judgment?

This has been the key to navigating the grief process for me—the very real certainty that God in His sovereign goodness has acted with love toward us and continues to do so. “One thing God has spoken, two things have I heard: that You, O God, are strong, and that You, O Lord, are loving” (Ps. 62:11-12). God does not look on families living with hidden disabilities with an exception attitude. To the contrary, Christ told us that when we accept one of “the least of these” we are accepting Him (Matt. 24:40). This has brought a sweet peace in my grief process.

Another challenge faced by families living with disability is isolation. Ask any parent of a child

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with a disability and they will acknowledge the painful reality of loneliness. It is only made more complex when that disability is hidden and unspoken. Old friends may disappear because of the discomfort of dealing with changed family circumstances. The rare friend stays with you, but many will drift away and move on with their lives. However, God has been gracious in guiding us to others who share the unique challenges. We are not alone. Many share the struggles.

There are many other challenges faced by families living with hidden disabilities: the incredible strain on the marriage and family, the inherent educational struggles, the financial burdens not covered by insurance, and the difficult decisions with no clear answers.

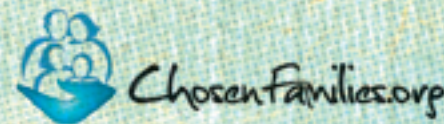
## Ministry opportunities

The church has a unique opportunity to step into these moments and be the body of Christ. I am certain Christ enters in when everyone else is leaving. He enters into the moment, and so should the body. Why? Because it is a great opportunity to demonstrate the love of Christ! A family dealing with a recent diagnosis of disability—whether at birth or later in life—is ripe for the grace-filled ministry of the Church.

Pastors could include families with hidden disabilities in congregational prayers. Age-group ministers could start a support group for parents or simply ask them what their children need in order to be more involved in the life of the church.

Anyone can take a meal, send a card, or give a hug. Let the family know you are praying for them—even if you readily acknowledge you don’t know exactly how to pray. Your transparency will be touching and minister to the often unspoken need.

The call to steward our children unto the Lord is no less compelling today than at any other time in history. Join us in the journey to raise our children—each fearfully and wonderfully and uniquely made—to love God and fulfill His purpose for their lives.



As a mother of a child with a hidden disability, Shannon Royce founded ChosenFamilies.org based on her firm belief that God is sovereign and does not make mistakes. ChosenFamilies.org will provide connections, resources, and encouragement to these families and the church bodies who love and minister to them.

