Disability, Embodiment, and Life Together

Hilary Yancey | August 29, 2026

I have been wrestling with questions about embodiment and disability since I started my journey in philosophy more than a decade ago. I think the biggest question and wondering that I am excited to share and think about together is the question about **how we understand and listen to the voices of those whose bodies and minds work in different ways, and how we integrate their testimony about how their embodiment shapes their experience of themselves, of the world, and of God into what we see and experience.**

I talked about this a little bit during my time with y'all at Open Table, and I'm still thinking about it: **where does the idea of a "normal" human body come from? What stories live in us, individually and in our communities, that might make some bodies count as "normal" and other bodies "abnormal"?**

I'm not sure that there *is* such a thing as a normal human body, the longer I think about it: or at the very least, this idea of a "normal" body has to be challenged.

Why do we need to challenge it?

Well, for a lot of reasons, but at least one that I think matters a great deal is that we often assume a person with disabilities, with a different kind of body, is worse off than they would be if they weren't disabled in that way. We assume that we know that their life would be better if that disability were changed: if a blind person could see, if a person who moves using a wheelchair could walk, if a nonverbal person could communicate verbally.

But why? Why do we assume that - and maybe more importantly, are we willing to have our assumptions challenged by the testimony of those persons?

How can we listen for the complexity of our embodiment, and how our embodiment interacts with other dimensions of our life? How one person experiences a particular bodily condition might change over time; it might be very different from how another person experiences a similar condition.

My hope is that, by challenging the assumption that disability, that certain kinds of embodiment more generally, are *always one way*, we can make space for the real glorious complexity to come in.

If we really believe that all human beings are made in the image of God, then we need a much wider, and more truly inclusive, table if we want to experience the fullness of Jesus in our communities. And if we believe that all are welcome at God's table, then we might have to ask if our church buildings live that out:

- Are our literal tables accessible to others? Are our parking lots? Our websites? Our everyday language?

- Are our worship songs or prayers sharing that vision of a wide welcome, a wide diversity of humans who don't need to be "cured" before they can be celebrated as fearfully and wonderfully made?

- Are we making space in our leadership for those who think, and speak, and move, differently from ourselves and from each other?

In my own experiences with my son, whose disabilities sometimes make it challenging to access community — whether that be educational, or in everyday life, or in church — I have realized that if I believe, as Jack has taught me, that he looks like Jesus - then without Jack, and others, I miss the chance to see the fullness of Jesus in God's people.