

GEORGE FOX UNIVERSITY

SPIRITUAL EMPOWERMENT OF SPECIAL-NEEDS FAMILIES

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To Sophia and to the special homes around the globe

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## Abstract

Families with children possessing disability face crushing challenges physically, economically, socially, emotionally, and spiritually. Sadly, most succumb to this onslaught and disintegrate. The tragedy of these families is only amplified in that they have the potential to influence lives, churches, and nations as perhaps no other entity can.

Chapter One focuses on understanding the tragedy of special needs families. The dehumanizing attitudes and denials of basic rights that handicap those with disability are examined. Chapter Two takes a closer look at the stresses and emotional whirlpools these families endure. Stress hardiness and cohesion/control mechanisms of families are also considered in an attempt to grasp why some families are actually enriched through their struggle. Chapter Three examines the ancient approach of Spiritual Direction. This approach is presented as a means for helping the family members find their true selves, and the true God speaking at the center of their beings. There is particular emphasis on levels of prayer, the Three Ways, and the “dark nights.” Chapter Four is given to the recently evolved approach of Narrative Therapy, a field that presents a new direction in the therapeutic world. The particular value of the approach here is in its skepticism of the cultural norm and in the way it imparts freedom to a family to re-author its own reality. This approach encourages the unearthing of dormant abilities and resources. Chapter Five concludes the study by examining the similarities and differences of these two approaches as applied to the special needs family, as well as by exploring how they complement one another in ways that can help such families survive and even thrive.

The aim of this study is not to formulate a rubber stamp method of empowerment for these families, but rather to be true to the sense of mystery and curiosity in both approaches. The path for each family is viewed as uniquely matched to its personality and experience in God. Overall, disability is viewed as having the potential for immense good, both in deepening individual lives and in bringing renewal to global society.





