



# **Disability Justice in the Church - Week 3**

A Second Hour Elective based on the book  
“My Body is Not a Prayer Request”  
by Dr. Amy Kenny

# Remember:

- We come to this space with differing backgrounds and experiences.
- Humility, curiosity, and respect are important as we engage with and learn from one another.
- It's OK to ask questions!
- We'll attempt to elevate the voices of those who live with disability as much as possible.
- Each person's perspective is their own and is both valid and unique. The disability community is not monolithic.
- God is with us.

# Review - Week 1

## able·ism

*/ˈəbəlɪzəm/* noun

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A system of assigning value to people's bodies and minds based on societally constructed ideas of normalcy, productivity, desirability, intelligence, excellence, and fitness. These constructed ideas are deeply rooted in eugenics, anti-Blackness, misogyny, colonialism, imperialism, and capitalism.

This systemic oppression leads to people and society determining people's value based on their culture, age, language, appearance, religion, birth or living place, "health/wellness", and/or their ability to satisfactorily re/produce, "excel" and "behave."

You do not have to be disabled to experience ableism.

working definition by @TalilaLewis, updated January 2022, developed in community with disabled Black/negatively racialized folk, especially @NotThreeFifths. Read more: [bit.ly/ableism2022](https://bit.ly/ableism2022)

# Review - Week 2

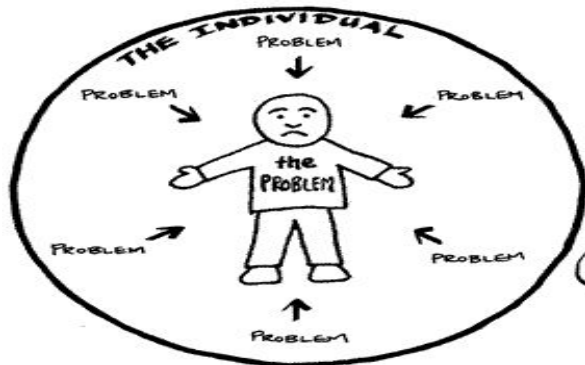
- Curing vs. Healing
- The church is called to the slow and difficult work of healing (the restoration of the individual to the beloved community)

***tov***: (Hebrew)

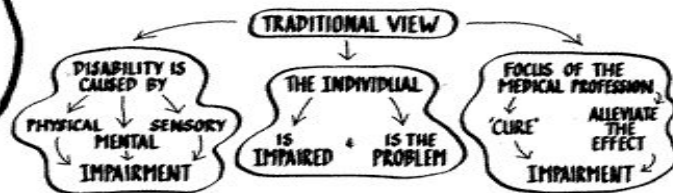
the goodness of the ties and relationships *between* things in creation

# Review - Week 2

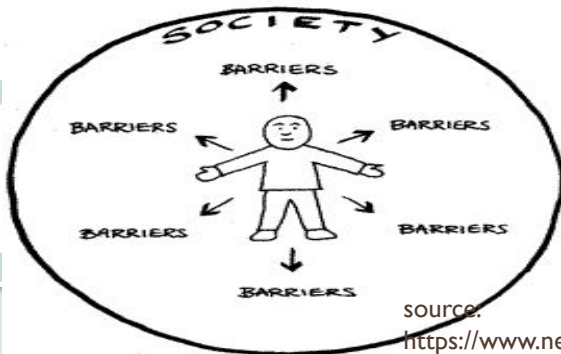
## THE MEDICAL MODEL OF DISABILITY



IMPAIRMENTS AND CHRONIC ILLNESS  
OFTEN POSE REAL DIFFICULTIES BUT  
- THEY ARE NOT THE MAIN PROBLEMS



## THE SOCIAL MODEL OF DISABILITY



source:

<https://www.neurodiversitysg.com/medical-model-vs-social-model.html>

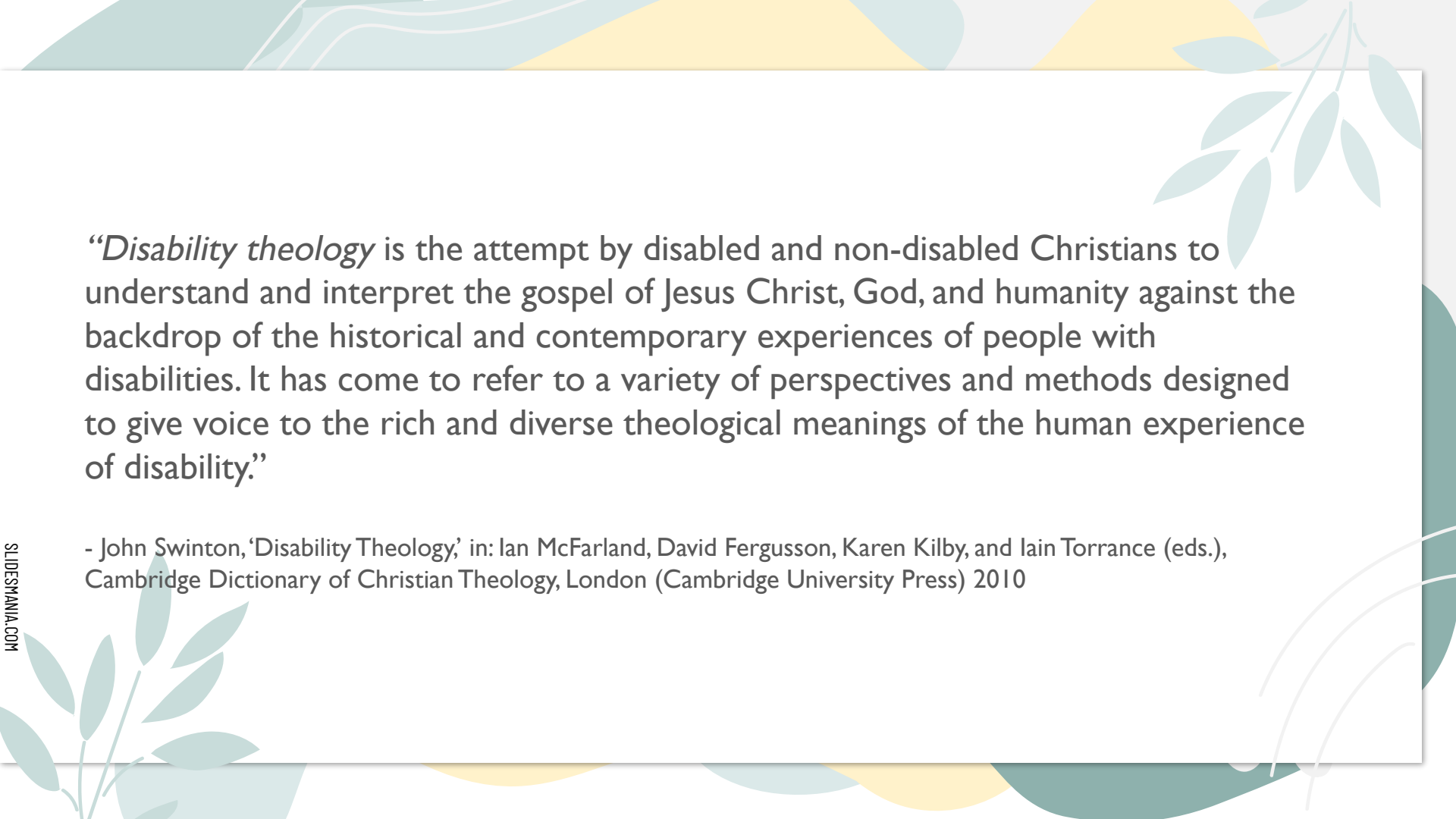
# Learning

Just as we need to dismantle ableism in our buildings and worship services and programs, we need to dismantle ableism in our understanding of God and scripture.



# Theology: How do we understand God?





*“Disability theology* is the attempt by disabled and non-disabled Christians to understand and interpret the gospel of Jesus Christ, God, and humanity against the backdrop of the historical and contemporary experiences of people with disabilities. It has come to refer to a variety of perspectives and methods designed to give voice to the rich and diverse theological meanings of the human experience of disability.”

- John Swinton, ‘Disability Theology,’ in: Ian McFarland, David Fergusson, Karen Kilby, and Iain Torrance (eds.), Cambridge Dictionary of Christian Theology, London (Cambridge University Press) 2010



# Listening

“My Body is Not a Prayer Request”

pp. 147-151

“Let disabled people lead in imagining what new creation could be for us...learn from us when we tell you how we imagine restoration. Let our imaginations for restoration light the way.” (p. 151)

# Disability-Gains Model

- We're often taught about disability as a “loss” of a function, sense, etc.
- What if we recognized disability as a necessary disruption to the status quo?
- If we allowed more room for biodiversity, we could embrace disabled peoples' cultural narratives and embodied wisdom in our communities.

“My Body is Not a Prayer Request”, p. 154

Instead of assuming that nondisabled bodies are perfect and complete, we can invite disability to teach us, just like we do with experiences of nature!



“Disability becomes a conceptual category, a methodology, a way of interpreting the world through biodiversity.” -p. 156

# Consider the Penguin...

Penguins walk in a “clunky”, shuffling waddle, but

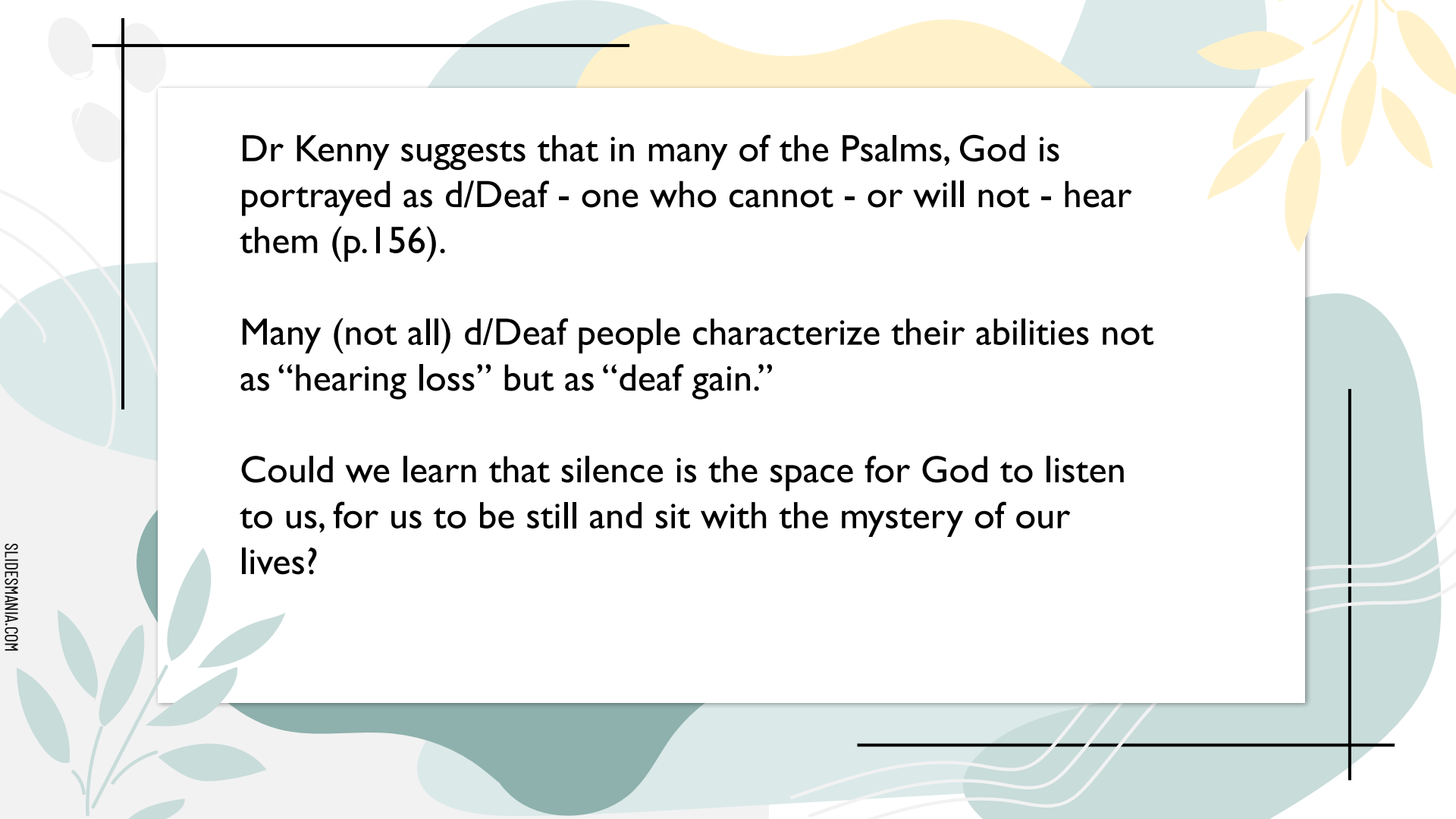
Penguins have the highest energy recovery rate of any land animal!

The way they move on ice increases stability due to lowering the center of gravity.

What if when we pictured the penguin, we didn't think of a funky shuffle, but a safer, more resourceful way to move?



Kate Wong, "Why Penguins Waddle," Scientific American, December 21, 2020



Dr Kenny suggests that in many of the Psalms, God is portrayed as d/Deaf - one who cannot - or will not - hear them (p.156).

Many (not all) d/Deaf people characterize their abilities not as “hearing loss” but as “deaf gain.”

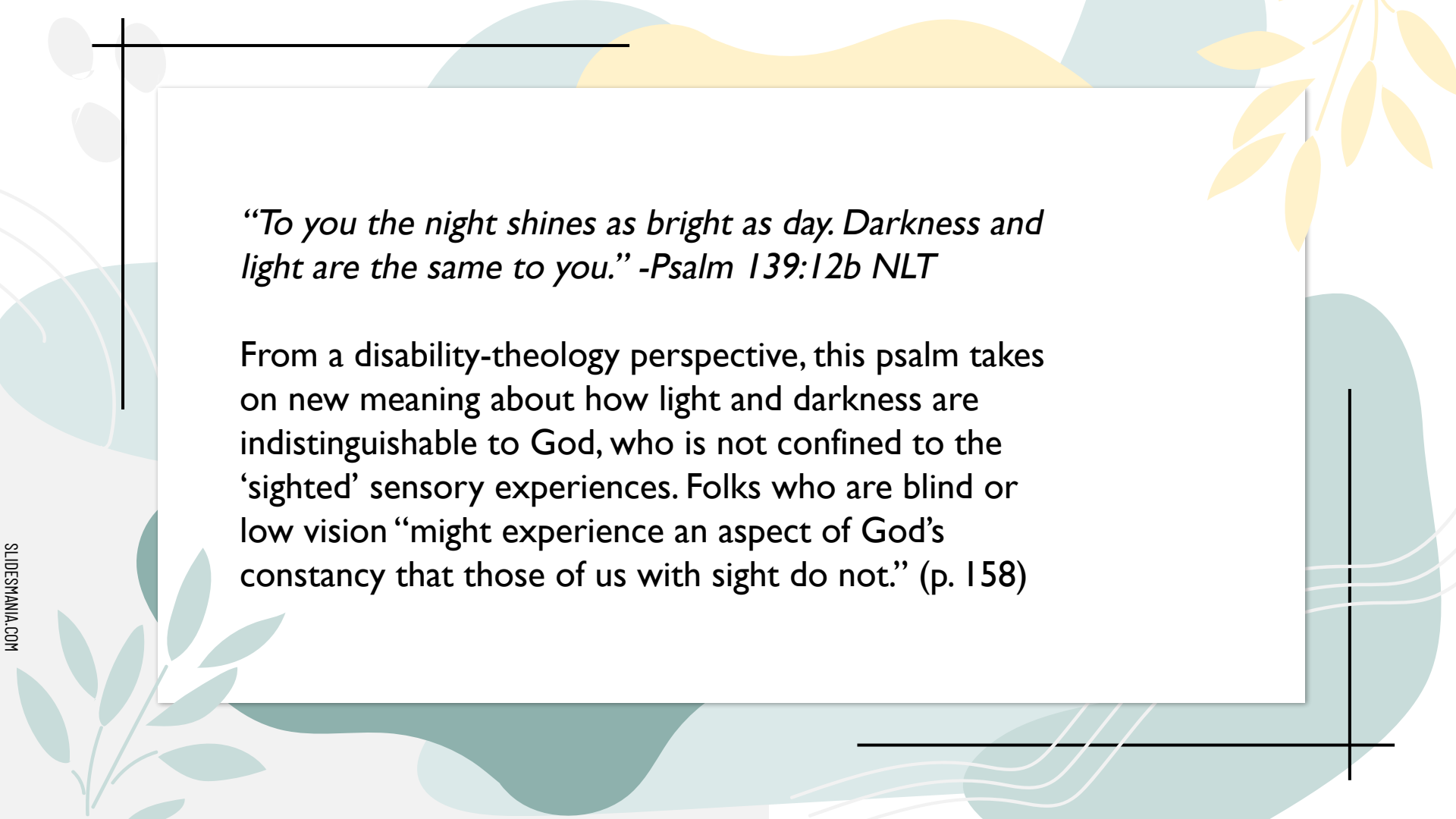
Could we learn that silence is the space for God to listen to us, for us to be still and sit with the mystery of our lives?

*“...the Holy Spirit prays for us with groanings that cannot be expressed in words.” Romans 8:26b NLT*

This calls to mind the communication experience of some who have developmental or intellectual disabilities, or are nonverbal.

The Spirit communicates in ways that cannot be contained by our systems of text and language.

“Grunts, groans, and sighs borrow the language of the Spirit, where every breath becomes the word of the living God. The language of the soul needn’t be verbalized in words.” (p. 157)



*“To you the night shines as bright as day. Darkness and light are the same to you.” -Psalm 139:12b NLT*

From a disability-theology perspective, this psalm takes on new meaning about how light and darkness are indistinguishable to God, who is not confined to the ‘sighted’ sensory experiences. Folks who are blind or low vision “might experience an aspect of God’s constancy that those of us with sight do not.” (p. 158)

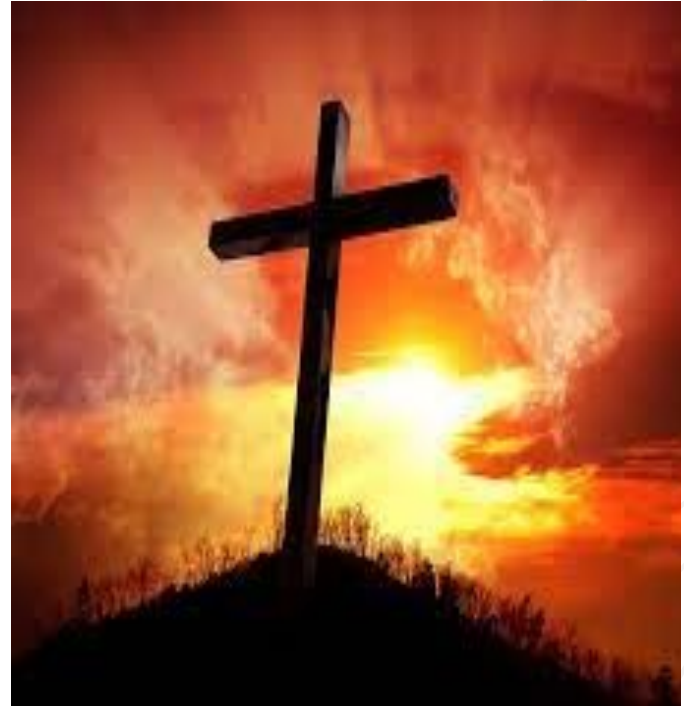
“The more that we expand our understanding of human experience, the more that we can learn about one another and imagine how each disability **illustrates God to the world**...Imagine the possibilities if we experienced bodily difference not as defect or loss but as a **unique opportunity to experience the diversity of a vast creator God**.” (p. 158)



# Listening

p. 167-170

“The truest revelation of who God is, the decisive victory over the dominions of darkness, is a disabled Jesus, emptying out for our sake on a dishonorable cross.” (p. 168)





**Questions?**

# Next Week:

We'll be spending time sharing our questions, thoughts, and stories. Please come with any stories you'd like to share (your own), any questions you may have, any comments for the Accessibility Ministry Team, or suggestions you have for future learning!