



# Irresistible Church Training

*For Disability Ministry*

Presented by



## Pathways to Belonging

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## How to Use:

This script lays out suggested talking points and content pulled directly from the specific book/resource highlighted. Here are a few things to know before you begin to use these scripts:

1. **Bold Type** is what you say. *Italic type* are suggestions and instructions.
2. The script is laid out with wide margins for easier reading without too much side to side eye movement. Sentences and paragraphs are broken up by phrasing and suggested pauses. = indicates a thought, phrase, or slight pause. • indicates the next slide.
3. In the *Italics* you will find suggestions for customizing the material with personal stories or examples.
4. Please retain the Irresistible Church logo and the Joni and Friends logo on each slide, with the exception of slides added for your church's purposes.
5. The first 3–5 slides will be similar in each presentation to allow you consistency in introducing yourself, the topic, Luke 14, and a definition of an Irresistible Church. If you are doing more than one session in a day, we suggest you present these slides in the first session and eliminate them in later presentations on the same day. (*You could also use them to encourage participation, or “test” the audience and ask them to describe the Luke 14 Mandate or to define an Irresistible Church*)
6. We have added suggested resources for each presentation. If you would like to purchase these, please visit [joniandfriends.org](http://joniandfriends.org).

## **Pathways to Belonging Presentation Outline:**

**Main objective:** To understand how to offer a variety of ministry environments that consider the unique learning styles and physical needs of individuals with disabilities so they can hear the gospel and find their place in the body of Christ.

**Suggested supplies:** *Bible* with all passages marked, copy of *Pathways to Belonging* book or PDF for each participant, Family Ministry Profile (found in the supplemental resources for *Pathways to Belonging* on [irresistiblechurch.org/library](http://irresistiblechurch.org/library)), PowerPoint in handout form, and pens for each person.

### **Suggested resources to accompany *Pathways to Belonging* training:**

*Joni: An Unforgettable Story*

*Beyond Suffering Bible*

*Real Families, Real Needs*

*Another Kind of Courage*

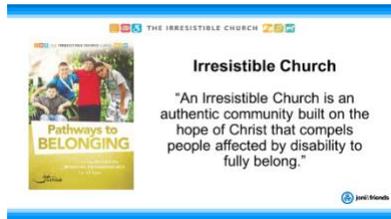
*Same Lake, Different Boat*

## SLIDE 1 - The Irresistible Church Series



*Use this slide while people arrive. You can choose to play some music in the background while the class arrives, gets settled and prepares for the session. If you want to add music to this presentation, go to Insert → Media → Audio/Audio on my PC. Choose the song and it will add a small music icon that you can place in the corner. You can customize the settings by clicking play back. Here's how you do it: Click the music icon on the slide, then click playback from the menu. All your options are here.*

## SLIDE 2 - Pathways to Belonging



*(When you are ready to begin click to this slide. The music should stop so that you can begin presenting.)*

*This is a great place to share why you are conducting this training, introduce the definition of The Irresistible Church and what you hope to accomplish through today's training!*

- = **The goal of this training is to understand how to offer a variety of ministry environments**
- = **that consider the unique learning styles and physical needs of individuals with disabilities**
- = **so they can hear the gospel and find their place in the body of Christ.**
- = **As we welcome people and serve the unique needs of every person that attends our church, we become an Irresistible Church.**

- = **An Irresistible Church is an authentic community built on the hope of Christ that compels people affected by disability to fully belong.**

### SLIDE 3 – Pathways to BELONGING



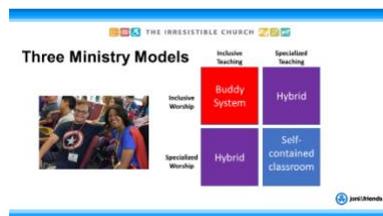
- = **“To belong is to be missed when you are absent.” -John Swinton**
- = **Today we will learn how we can remove barriers that might prevent someone from truly belonging in our church.**
- = **There is a difference between being welcomed and belonging somewhere.**
- = **You can welcome a stranger into your home, but only family *belongs* there.**
- = **Biblically speaking, people with disabilities *already* belong in the church.**
- = **They are image bearers of God, their sins were paid for by Christ.**
- = **They can have salvation through Jesus Christ and receive spiritual gifts for the benefit of the church.**
- = **Viewed from this perspective, by creating pathways to belonging, we are helping our church better reflect what is already true.**

## SLIDE 4 - What Does it Look Like to Fully Belong?



- **A church where people with disabilities can fully belong is a church where people of all abilities have full access to...**
  - **Fellowship with other believers**
  - **Worshipping God in community**
  - **And hearing teaching from God's Word.**
- = **Creating pathways to belonging means making opportunities for people of all abilities to participate in the life of the church.**
- = **There are three primary ministry models we can use to help pave these pathways. as illustrated on the next slide.**

## SLIDE 5 – Three Ministry Models



- = **Our goal is to be as inclusive as possible.**
- = **In some cases, physical access is all that is needed for full inclusion.**

- = In other cases, supports (such as noise-cancelling headphones, sensory bags, or a one-on-one buddy) may allow full or partial inclusion.
- = We'll talk about what this might look like practically later on, but for now understand that our goal is to meet the needs of people based on their unique learning styles and physical needs.

## SLIDE 6 - Fruitful Ministry



- = **“All this I have spoken while still with you. But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you.” -John 14:25-26**
- = Remember that as we are considering how to teach those who may need extra help, or those who may not be able to verbally communicate ... the Holy Spirit is the one who speaks to our hearts.
- = Though we can't control everything, we can be faithful to teach the gospel in a way that everyone has a chance to learn about God's great love for us.

## SLIDE 7 – Buddy Ministry



**Buddy Ministry**

- Most inclusive option
- Fewest resources required
- Provides:
  - Discipleship
  - Friendship
  - Safety

- = **Most people feel more comfortable in an unfamiliar environment when accompanied by a friend.**
- = **For many of our friends with special needs, places like church can seem overwhelming, confusing, and scary.**
- = **Pairing someone with a 1-on-1 “buddy” can allow them to participate in mainstream activities.**
- = **The benefits to a Buddy Ministry...**
  - **It is the most inclusive option. A buddy is a form of support that allows someone to be a part of typical activities!**
  - **Buddy ministry requires very few additional resources.**
    - **Usually, you just need to find a willing volunteer to serve as a buddy.**
    - **There’s no budget, construction project, or special curriculum needed.**
  - **A buddy also provides...**
    - **Discipleship, friendship, and safety.**
- = **Except in cases where someone is medically fragile, buddies do not**

- necessarily need to be experts on special needs or disability!**
- = They simply need to be willing to become an expert on their friend.**
- = The most important qualification a buddy can have is the heart of Christ for all people.**
- = For children, an adult buddy is usually best. But for youth or adults, a peer buddy is often preferred.**

## SLIDE 8 – The 5 Environments



- = When someone is struggling to participate in a mainstream setting, it is often helpful to narrow down the cause of the difficulty.**
- = To accomplish this, we can think through five different environments that might require a little more support.**
  - The physical environment is the first and most obvious of the five.**
    - If someone cannot easily access the space, (stairs)**
    - navigate inside the space, or (too many desks or tables)**
    - comfortably use the space (too dark)...**
    - the physical environment may be the problem.**

- **Related to the physical space is the sensory environment.**
  - **In addition to architecture and classroom design, we also need to think through how the senses are being engaged.**
  - **If noise, light, textures, or scents become overwhelming, a “physically accessible” space may still be inaccessible.**
  - **Walk through a space and look with more than your eyes. What do you see? What do you hear? What do you smell?**
- **The third environment is the social environment.**
  - **A classroom that is perfectly accessible and sensory friendly may still be inaccessible**
  - **if it is filled with people who are unwelcoming in their words or deeds.**
  - **This does not always mean outright unfriendliness.**
  - **We must consider how our staff and volunteers are modeling acceptance of our friends with disabilities.**
- **The fourth environment is the communication environment.**
  - **A classroom that is physically accessible, sensory friendly, and filled with friendly people**
  - **may still be hard to participate in if our friends have a hard time understanding what is being said.**

- **We need to take time to consider not only *what* we are saying, but *how* we are saying it!**
- **Incorporating engaging visuals (pictures of the story) and physical activity (hand motions) can help communicate what we mean.**
- **The final environment is the cognitive environment.**
  - **This one is perhaps the most difficult to think through and will vary from individual to individual.**
  - **The cognitive environment deals with someone's ability to process and understand information.**
  - **Putting things in concrete terms can help immensely. Use examples from real life.**
  - **We cannot assume everyone will be able to "fill in the gaps."**
  - **Sometimes, these gaps can be closed by a buddy who can take time to talk with their friend after the lesson, sermon, or message.**
- = **If these five environments cannot be made accessible in a mainstream setting, it may be time to consider a hybrid ministry model.**

## SLIDE 9 – When Do you Need a Hybrid Ministry?

THE IRRESISTIBLE CHURCH

### When do you Need a Hybrid Ministry?

- Not thriving in a 1-1 environment
- Sensory overload is occurring
- There are too many changes and transitions
- Aggression towards self or others



Just Friends

= **When might we consider a hybrid ministry model?**

- **When someone is not thriving in a mainstream environment with a one-on-one buddy...**
- **When sensory overload is occurring... worship is too loud, the room is too crowded**
- **When there are too many changes and transitions in the schedule... our friend may feel overwhelmed and unable to keep up**
- **Or when your friend is exhibiting aggression towards themselves or others (hitting, biting self or others).**

## SLIDE 10 – What Can a Hybrid Ministry Provide?

THE IRRESISTIBLE CHURCH

### What can a Hybrid Ministry Provide?

- Participation in certain mainstream activities
- Time for an evaluation season
- A bridge to mainstream activities as they mature



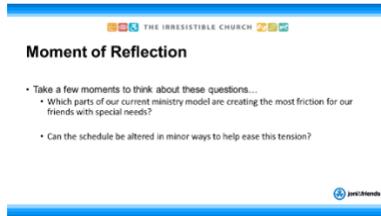
Just Friends

= **What can a Hybrid Ministry provide?**

- **Hybrid models are, in many cases, a pathway to greater inclusion in certain mainstream activities.**
  - **For example, if worship causes someone to become overstimulated, making it impossible for them to participate in the lesson,**
  - **it may be best to create a lower sensory, specialized worship environment.**
  
  - **And then join the mainstream group for the lesson**
  
  - **Using a hybrid model allows your friend to participate in some of the mainstream activities.**
  
- **Hybrid ministries can also provide a season of evaluation.**
  - **If someone is not thriving in the mainstream setting,**
  
  - **time spent in a hybrid ministry model can help identify the barriers they are facing in a fully mainstream setting.**
  
- **Hybrid ministry can also provide a bridge back to mainstream activities as your friend matures.**
  - **Hybrid ministry should not be seen as a permanent state, but something that can be frequently assessed.**
  
  - **For example, someone new to the church may require a hybrid ministry for the first few months,**
  
  - **but as they become more familiar with the church environment and rhythms,**

**find it possible to integrate in the mainstream setting.**

## SLIDE 11 – Moment of Reflection



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### Moment of Reflection

- Take a few moments to think about these questions...
  - Which parts of our current ministry model are creating the most friction for our friends with special needs?
  - Can the schedule be altered in minor ways to help ease this tension?

just4them

*Invite the group to break up into pairs or small groups for discussion. Ask for answers with specific examples relevant to your ministry, not abstract principles.*

- = **“Take a few moments to think about these questions...”**
- **“Which parts of our current ministry model are creating the most friction for our friends with special needs?” and...**
- **“Can the schedule be altered in minor ways to help ease this tension?”**

## SLIDE 12 – Positives of a Self-Contained Classroom



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### Positives of a Self-Contained Classroom

- Personalized
- Enables each person to learn in their unique style
- Self-stimulatory behavior, repetition, movement
- First-time visitors
- Consistency



just4them

- = **Remember! Ultimately, inclusion is an important, but secondary goal.**

- = **The primary goal is for people of all abilities to experience the love of God and understand the gospel message.**
- = **If an inclusive or hybrid model cannot accomplish this, then a self-contained classroom is good option!**
  
- = **Self-contained classrooms have several benefits...**
  - **They are personalized! Self-contained classrooms can be adapted to fit each individual's unique needs.**
  - **Self-contained classrooms also enable each person to learn in their unique style.**

*If you have a personal story or example, now would be a great time to share.*

- **Self-contained classrooms are also safe places where your friend can**
  - **engage in self-stimulating behavior, repetition,**
  - **and movement without distracting or injuring others.**
  
- **First-time visitors concerned about integrating into the mainstream programs have a place where their needs can be more easily accommodated.**
  - **This is especially important to parents of a child with special needs who have experienced hurt and rejection at other churches.**
  
- **Self-contained classrooms also provide consistency.**

- **While mainstream classrooms can change a lot on a weekly basis,**
- **a self-contained classroom can be a place of stable comfort that grows and adjusts at the pace of those who participate.**

## **SLIDE 13 – Designing a Self-Contained Classroom**



- = **When preparing your home for guests, what do you do?**
- = **You might make sure there are fresh sheets and towels in your guest's room.**
- = **You might begin preparing their favorite meal.**
- = **You might make sure the porch light is on.**
- = **When we're preparing a self-contained classroom,**
- = **we need to make similar considerations to ensure that our classroom is welcoming and ready to receive guests.**
- **We need to consider the 5 Ss:**
- **The first S is "space."**
  - **Can people with physical limitations and wheelchairs access all areas of the room?**

- **Think about navigating through the room, reaching supplies, fitting at tables...**
- **The second S is “sensory stimulation.”**
  - **Is your classroom near loud noises?**
  - **Are there lightbulbs that flicker, or chaotic, clashing colors on the walls?**
  - **Is there a strong odor from cleaning supplies, flowers outside a window, or even the soap, deodorant, or perfume of teachers?**
- **The third S is “set-up.”**
  - **How are the events of the day staged?**
  - **Many friends may need to take certain activities at their own pace.**
  - **Setting up the day’s activities to be taken in stages can be very helpful.**
- **The fourth S is “schedule.”**
  - **Change can be very hard for individuals with special needs, especially children.**
  - **Sticking to a routine each week,**
  - **having visible schedules,**
  - **and providing plenty of warnings prior to a transition can give everyone a chance to feel like they know what’s coming next.**

- **Without these accommodations, changing activities can be disorienting and frustrating.**
- **The fifth and final S is “safety.”**
  - **The safety considerations we need to take into account will depend on the individual.**
  - **If someone has a habit of running out to their car in the parking lot when they are done with their activities,**
  - **limiting the number of exits will prevent someone from slipping away unnoticed.**
  - **If someone has a fixation with eating anything they can get their hands on,**
  - **limiting the number of loose items in the classroom can prevent ingesting things that are not food.**

## SLIDE 14 – A Few Ideas for Lessons



*Talk about as many or as few of the points on the slide as you like. Some are self-explanatory, others might warrant some further explanation.*

- = **When crafting lessons, we don't necessarily need to use a different curriculum.**
- = **Instead, we can follow some of these principles to make our teaching**

**understandable and accessible to as many people as possible.**

- = Our goal is not to have everyone learn the same things in the same way, but for everyone to learn what they can in the way they are best suited to learn.**
- = We want to give everyone a chance to learn the truths of Scripture.**
- = Even though each person is unique, God's Word is universal!**

## **SLIDE 15 – Group Discussion**



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**Group Discussion**

- What are some ways to adapt curriculum that you might already have in place in your church?
- Can you think of people who might be able to help with curriculum adaptation?

justheads

*Invite the group to break up into pairs or small groups for discussion. Consider providing some specific examples from your church.*

- **What are some ways you are already adapting curriculum?**
- **What are ways you can further adapt your curriculum to meet the needs of a broader audience?**

## SLIDE 16 – Children



- = **Kids have unique needs! As we adapt curriculum for children, we want to emphasize...**
- **Keeping things concrete.**
  - **Avoid the use of metaphors, figures of speech, or overly abstract language.**
  - **Ground the lessons to real life examples, and whenever possible relate the scriptural truth to the individual!**
  - **Insert your friend's name into a Bible verse. For example, "For God so loved... Bobby."**
- **We also want to make sure our lessons are engaging.**
  - **This will vary between individuals!**
  - **What is "engaging" for one child may not be engaging for another.**
  - **It's OK for this to be a learning process.**
- **Finally, our lessons need to be...consistent.**
  - **Keeping routines, schedules, and volunteers consistent help children learn what's expected of them,**

- and allows them to anticipate what's coming next.

## SLIDE 17 – Teens



- = **The teenage years are tumultuous for anyone!**
- = **And just like everyone else, our friends with special needs and disabilities will experience hormonal, social, and emotional changes during these formative years.**
- = **Because of that, it's important we pay attention to these unique needs and allow them to...**
- **Build relationships with other teens.**
  - **A huge part of being a teenager is developing friendships and learning to socialize with peers.**
  - **This is a basic experience that happens without effort for many typical teens but is often denied to teens with disabilities.**
  - **While we can't *force* anyone to be friends, we can create opportunities to build relationships!**
- = **We can also help teens with disabilities...**

- **Plan in advance for social outings.**
  - **For many teens with disabilities, planning the logistics of medications, transportation, and care require advance planning.**
  - **While many teens can change plans at the drop of a hat,**
  - **allowing someone with a disability to prepare emotionally, physically, and practically can help increase participation in church activities and social events.**
- **And remember: being a teenager is hard!**

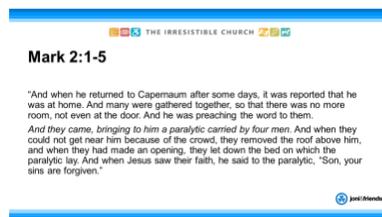
## SLIDE 18 – Adults



- = **In many cases, adults with disabilities have the greatest difficulty connecting in churches.**
- = **While children and teens often have parents and caretakers that can advocate on their behalf,**
- = **many adults with disabilities find themselves in the care of people who are not their family members.**

- = In cases where someone is unable to advocate for themselves, or engage in activities within the church, it is our job to seek them out.
- The greatest hurdle adults with disabilities face in the church is a lack of *fellowship*.
- = Think about the story of the paralytic man in Mark 2:1-5...

## SLIDE 19 – Mark 2:1-5



- And when he returned to Capernaum after some days, it was reported that he was at home.
- = And many were gathered together, so that there was no more room, not even at the door. And he was preaching the word to them.
- And they came, bringing to him a paralytic carried by four men.
- = And when they could not get near him because of the crowd, they removed the roof above him, and when they had made an opening, they let down the bed on which the paralytic lay.
- = And when Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralytic, "Son, your sins are forgiven."
- = First Century Israel was not in any way "accessible."

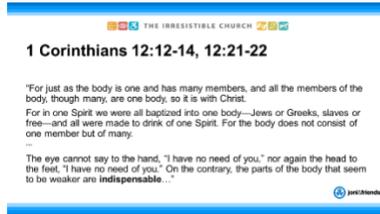
- = **There were no wheelchairs, there were no ramps, and the crowd was too thick for *anyone* to get in the building!**
- = **But because the paralyzed man had friends; they could get him to Jesus.**
- = **If our churches are to be accessible, they must be filled with people who desire friendship and fellowship with people with disabilities.**

## SLIDE 20- Adults



- **In addition to friendship, adults with disabilities need an opportunity to serve!**
- = **God has given gifts to every Christian. These gifts have been given for the benefit of the church.**
- = **Giving adults with disabilities an opportunity to contribute to their community is necessary and good.**
- = **Guests sit back and are served, but family helps do the dishes.**
- = **Genuine *belonging* in the church means having opportunities to use the gifts God has given you. And that includes adults with disabilities.**

## SLIDE 21- 1 Corinthians 12:12-14, 12:21-22



- = **1 Corinthians 12 has a lot to say about the church!**
- = **And it has a lot of application for how a church should think about people with disabilities. Let's read...**
- **“For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ.**
- = **For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and all were made to drink of one Spirit. For the body does not consist of one member but of many.**
- **The eye cannot say to the hand, “I have no need of you,” nor again the head to the feet, “I have no need of you.” On the contrary, the parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable...”**
- = **People with disabilities need the church, and the church needs people without disabilities.**
- = **As we seek to include people of all ages with disabilities in our congregation, our church will *truly* become more complete!**

## SLIDE 22 – Irresistible Church



*Introduce Irresistible Church  
([irresistiblechurch.org](http://irresistiblechurch.org)) and the other training  
resources for disability ministry.*

## SLIDE 23 – Questions



*Remember to change this  
slide to have your name  
and contact information!*

*Close in prayer*