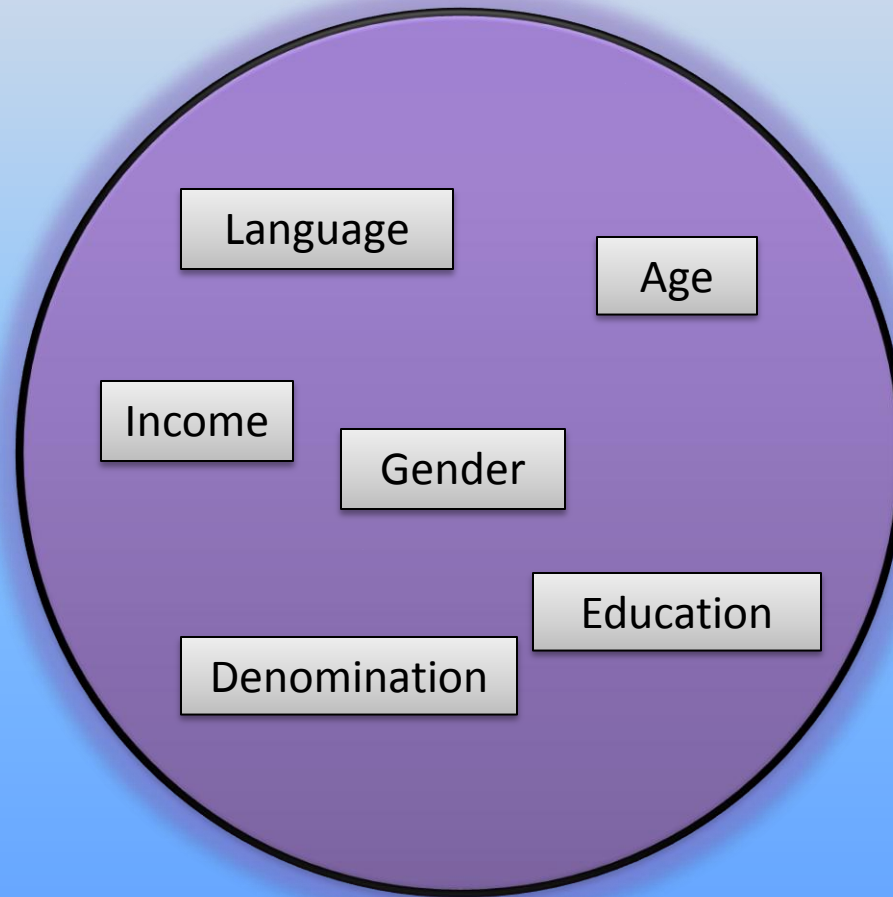


# INCLUSION IN THE CHURCH



**Mike Woods, M.A.**  
**Autism and Inclusion Specialist**

# What's "Normal?"



# Culture

- **Culture refers to the characteristics of a particular people.**
- **Cultural norms affect the ways people think, dress, talk, spend their leisure time, and other fundamental aspects of human behavior.**

# **Autism as a Culture**

- Autism is not truly a culture, it is a developmental disability caused by a neurological dysfunction.**
- However, this dysfunction affects the ways that individuals with autism think, talk, eat, spend leisure time, and understand their world.**

# **Wanted: Cross-Cultural Interpreter**

- The role of a special needs ministry for a person with autism is like that of a cross-cultural interpreter: someone who understands both cultures and is able to translate the customs of the non-autistic environment to the person with autism.**

- In effect, what we attempt to do for people with autism is what we ourselves might wish for when we travel in a foreign country.



# **Cross-Cultural Interpreter**

- **So to help develop spiritual growth in a person with autism, it is important to understand their culture and the strengths and deficits that are associated with it so that you can support them in learning about your culture, the Christian culture.**

**But before we learn a little bit more about autism let's briefly review important characteristics of our culture: the Church, the body of Christ, the "ekklesia."**





# The Body of Christ is:

- **A place of Believing**
  - **Our value is not based on what we can do...but who we are.**



# The Body of Christ is:

- **A place of Welcome**
  - **It is not only to open one's door...but to open one's heart.**



# The Body of Christ is:

- **A place of Belonging**
  - **One of the most fundamental needs of every human being is to belong.**



# The Body of Christ is:

- **A place of Caring**
  - **It is people that matter.**



# The Body of Christ is:

- A place of Love

➤ *“A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you so you must love one another.”*



# Characteristics of Autism

- **Excessive focus on details**
  - **People with autism are often very good at noticing minute details. Particularly visual details.**



# Characteristics of Autism

- **Distractibility**

- **It can be difficult for people with autism to pay attention because of their need to focus on something else.**



# Characteristics of Autism

- **Concrete Thinking**
  - **Difficulty with abstract language concepts.**





# Characteristics of Autism

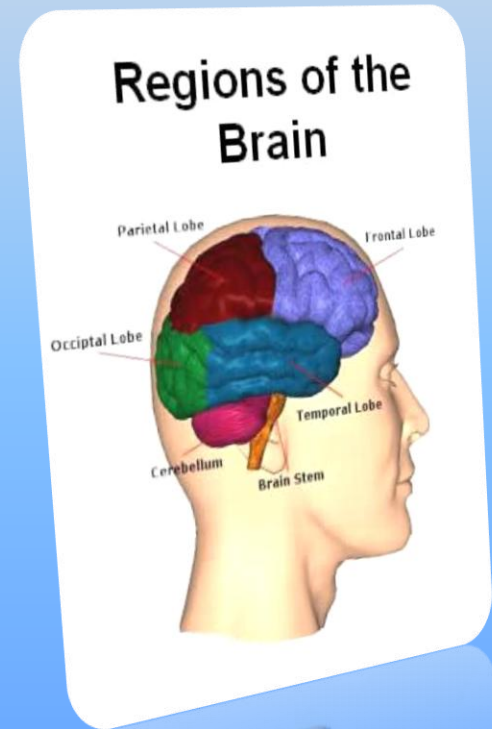
- **Organizing and Sequencing**
  - **Difficulty integrating multiple pieces of information.**



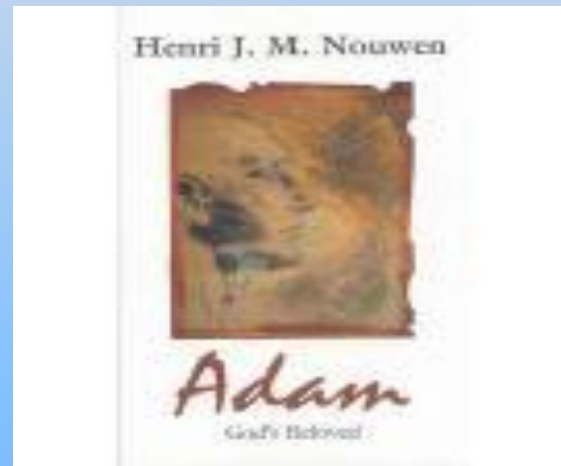
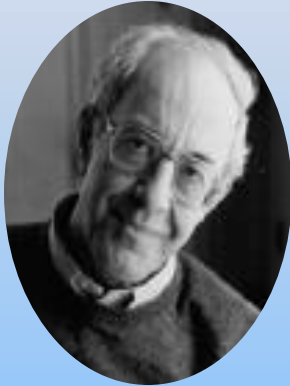
# Characteristics of Autism

- **Generalizing**

➤ **Difficulty transferring skills and behaviors across places and/or people.**



# The Gifts of Autism



# The Gifts of Autism

- ❖ **People with autism show us the capacity for love in our hearts.**
- ❖ **People with autism show us our own vulnerability.**
- ❖ **People with autism teach us how to live the Gospel.**

