



# REAL FAITH, REAL STORIES, REAL TALK ABOUT NEURODIVERSITY

## FACILITATOR GUIDE: BUILDING A FOUNDATION UNDERSTANDING OF NEURODIVERSITY

*Focus: Participants will gain a foundational understanding of neurodiversity while exploring how differences in thinking, learning, and sensory experience shape individuals' engagement with worship, community, and faith. This session invites participants to deepen awareness, challenge assumptions, and begin imagining more inclusive congregational practices for neurodiverse individuals of all ages, especially children.*

### **Opening Prayer** (Facilitator prays aloud)

Eternal God, we come before You as people who are still learning—learning to see more clearly, to listen more deeply, and to love more faithfully. Open our eyes to the beauty of human diversity, especially in the ways people think, process, and experience the world. Where we have made assumptions, bring understanding. Where we have caused harm, bring awareness and grace. Where we have been unaware, awaken us with compassion. Help us to recognize the fullness of Your image in every person, and to resist the temptation to measure worth by comfort, familiarity, or ease. Guide us toward practices that reflect Your justice and mercy so that our communities may become places of belonging, where every person is seen, valued, and welcomed. Amen.

### **Scripture Reading**

1 Corinthians 12:1-31

(Assign reading to table groups or read aloud)

### **Facilitator Notes To Share During Reflection**

As you read, reflect, and discuss the passage, make sure to note that Paul's letter to the Church in Corinth highlights the gifts of the Holy Spirit and the unity of the Christian body. He moves into a detailed discussion of spiritual gifts, their distribution, and their purpose. Paul emphasizes that all these gifts come from one Spirit and that each gift serves the common good. Paul shares the analogy of the human body to illustrate the Church:

- The body is one, though made up of many parts.
- Each part is necessary; no part is "less" than another.
- God arranges parts according to God's design.
- Stronger or more visible parts are not more important; weaker or less visible parts are honored more.
- The body is unified, with mutual concern among its members.
- If one part suffers, all suffer; if one is honored, all rejoice.
- Paul reminds us that difference is essential to the body, not a problem to fix.

## Additional Facilitator Notes To Share During Reflection (Optional)

- The Church is healthiest when it reflects the full range of God’s created diversity.
- Factoring this all in, lift this question to the group: What kinds of differences do we celebrate—and which do we struggle to understand? Is your Church more accepting of one difference over another? What about differences that are “hidden” or not easily noticed, like the invisible variations versus notable visible differences existing among us?
- Ask if they agree or disagree with the following statement, “Diversity is not an obstacle to overcome—it is part of God’s design.” Allow time to discuss.

You could transition by saying today’s video helps us build a clearer understanding of neurodiversity, noting what it is, what it is not, and why it matters in the life of the Church. For many, this may be a new language. For others, it may reflect lived experience. As we watch this video together, we are invited to move beyond assumptions and toward a deeper awareness of how people experience not only the world differently, but also how those differences shape and impact participation in worship, learning, and community. Building awareness, gaining understanding, and engaging in reflection and honest conversation invite each of us into an opportunity for growth. As our perspectives expand, so does our capacity to become a church community where all people belong, and where neurodiverse and neurotypical individuals alike can fully participate in worshipping God and enjoy the blessings of our shared Christian life together.

## Key Terms For Understanding Neurodiversity

- **Neurodiversity:** Natural variations in how people think, learn, and experience the world. Difference, not deficit.
- **Neurodivergent:** Refers to people whose brains process and interact differently in areas like learning, attention, communication, or sensory experience.
- **Autism:** A developmental disorder that affects social interaction, communication, and behavior, and may include challenges with social cues, language, and repetitive behaviors.
- **Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD):** A disorder that affects attention, hyperactivity, and impulsivity, and may include challenges with focus, organization, and impulse control.

## Video Viewing

Show Big Faith Resources’ video *Real Faith, Real Stories, Real Talk About Neurodiversity*, which can be found at <https://bigfaithresources.com/big-faith-resources-video>

## Facilitator Instructions

Invite participants to jot down emotions or personal connections while watching. Lead group discussion. Lead with openness; don't rush responses. Listen to how neurodiversity is described and experienced.

- What new insights or understanding did you gain from this video? What surprised you or challenged something you previously believed?
- How did the video expand your understanding of neurodiversity?
- What misconceptions about neurodiversity might exist in our broader culture or in the Church? Where might neurotypical bias show up in church life (worship, teaching, expectations)?

## Quotes To Share To Deepen Reflection

- Thomas Armstrong says, *“Neurodiversity suggests that neurological differences are to be recognized and respected as any other human variation. These differences can be sources of strength and creativity, not simply obstacles to be overcome.”*
- Temple Grandin shares, *“The world needs all kinds of minds. Different ways of thinking bring different strengths, and those strengths are essential to innovation, understanding, and community.”*

## Digging Deeper

The facilitator may want to share, *“Despite strides in inclusivity, neurodiverse children (and their families) often face exclusion in church, especially corporate worship, hindering their engagement in faith practices and fellowship. As a result, half of the parents of children with special needs skip religious activities due to a lack of support.”*

John Swinton remarked, *“The question is not how we make people fit into our communities, but how our communities are shaped so that all people can flourish as who they are.”*

Hand out paper to each participant and give them time to reflect on the following questions:

- What might it mean that God creates and values many kinds of minds?
- How does this expand our understanding of community in Christ?
- Where might our church unintentionally prioritize one way of thinking or participating?
- How might we begin to notice and value different ways of engaging?
- What could become possible in our church if we truly embraced neurodiversity?
- What might we learn from people who experience the world differently?

## Transition Suggestion

Depending on the amount of time you have left, you can invite the members to share their answers in small groups or in a larger discussion. If time is short, the reflection can be considered just a time of private reflection.

Next, the facilitator reads aloud, *“Understanding leads to awareness. Awareness leads to compassion. And compassion invites change. As we grow in understanding neurodiversity, we begin to see more clearly how God’s image is reflected in the fullness of human difference. We have hope, for the Church is always learning. We are guided by the Holy Spirit, and as we deepen our understanding, we are invited to grow—not just in knowledge, but in how we live together as a community shaped by grace. Each new insight is an opportunity to become a more faithful reflection of Christ’s love.”*

Ask the following questions: (Optional)

- What would it look like for our church to become a learning community around neurodiversity?
- What first step could we take to continue growing in understanding?
- What is one new understanding you are taking with you?
- What is one question you still have?

Thank participants for their time. Invite them to consider how they might continue this discussion and when they may want to reconvene for further study and reflection as they learn together about neurodiversity in the Church.

## Closing Prayer (Facilitator prays aloud)

God of wisdom and wonder, help us to remain curious and to approach one another with compassion. Shape us into a community that reflects Your love—not only in what we believe, but in how we welcome and value one another. Guide us as we grow, and remind us that every person is held in Your care. In Christ’s name we pray. Amen.

*Additional resources, including handouts, additional videos, and downloadable materials can be found at [BigFaithResources.com](https://www.BigFaithResources.com).*

