

## 18 The Castle Tower Isn't Always Pride: What the Church Misunderstands About Neurodivergent Isolation (Part 1 of 3)

May 02, 2026

---

I have children that are neurodivergent.

Watching them navigate a world that wasn't built for how their brains work has taught me something **I wish the church understood better.**

But before I go any further, let me define that word - *neurodivergent*.

Because I know some of you may have just tensed up.

Neurodivergence simply means a brain that is wired differently from what we consider typical.

It isn't a choice.

It isn't a parenting failure.

It isn't a cultural trend or a political statement.

**It is neurological – present from birth, documented by medical science, and far more common than most people realize.**

ADHD, ASD/autism, dyslexia, dysgraphia and others like them – these are not excuses.

These are diagnoses.

Real ones.

**With real impact on real people sitting in your congregation right now.**

Consider PTSD.

Most of us know someone whose life has been profoundly affected by it.

We would never walk up to a combat veteran struggling with post-traumatic stress and say "just get over it."

We understand that what happened to them rewired something deep in their brain.

That it isn't a choice.

That it isn't weakness.

That dismissing it doesn't make it go away – **it just makes the person feel more alone.**

Neurodivergence works the same way.

You don't choose it.

You can't pray it away.

And telling someone to "just try harder" or "just have more faith" doesn't address what's actually happening neurologically.

**It just teaches them to hide.**

I know this firsthand.

I have ADHD traits myself.

I didn't always have a name for it.

It wasn't until one of my daughters went through a professional evaluation that I started researching what her diagnosis actually meant.

And somewhere in that research, I found myself, it was quite the revelation.

At 56, I've had decades to develop coping mechanisms younger neurodivergent people haven't had time to build yet.

One of mine is writing.

I discovered early on that I have to work significantly harder than most people just to retain what I've heard or been taught.

Details that others absorb and recall effortlessly?

For my brain, they slip away quickly without something to anchor them.

**Good note taking changed everything for me.**

It's one of the reasons I write – not just to communicate, but because writing is how my brain actually holds onto what it learns.

What most people do naturally, I have to be intentional about.

And I had no idea that was unusual until I finally had language for why my brain worked that way.

We see someone withdraw from social situations and assume they think they're better than us.

We watch them struggle with small talk and call it snobbery.

We notice them watching from the sidelines and label it pride.

But what if we're misreading the signals entirely?

**What if what looks like arrogance is actually exhaustion?**

What sounds like snobbery is sensory overload?

**What seems like pride is just a different way of processing the world?**

## **What the Tower Really Is**

In my book I describe the castle tower as the loneliest room – the highest point, the best view, the most isolated place.

Most people build their way there over time.

Accumulated pain. Failed relationships. Stuffed emotions. Wounds that never healed.

Brick by brick, room by room, until isolation becomes the only place that feels safe.

But for neurodivergent people, something different is often true.

**They didn't always build their way to the tower. Sometimes they were born closer to it.**

Not because of trauma – though trauma can certainly deepen it.

But because the world outside the tower has always felt louder, more chaotic, more demanding than it does for everyone else.

The noise was always too much.

The social expectations were always confusing.

The unwritten rules everyone else seemed to absorb naturally never quite made sense.

**The tower wasn't a destination they arrived at after years of pain. For many neurodivergent people, it was the starting point.**

I want to address something directly – because I know some of you are thinking it, even if you wouldn't say it out loud.

The thought that goes something like: "Neurodivergence is just a modern label for kids who weren't disciplined properly. We didn't have all these diagnoses when I was growing up and everyone turned out fine."

I understand why that thought exists.

But let me tell you what neurodivergence actually looked like in my own family.

One of my sons was diagnosed with dysgraphia – a neurological condition affecting the brain's ability to coordinate the physical act of writing.

**He could calculate the answer in his head with no problem.**

He understood the math.

His brain was working exactly as it should.

But when asked to write out the equation on paper, something broke down between his brain and his hand.

The numbers wouldn't cooperate.

What should have taken seconds took agonizing minutes, and numbers were still wrong even though his hand and eyes said they were right.

There were tears.

There was frustration – **not from laziness, not from defiance** – but from a brain that simply could not transmit numbers to the page the way the system expected.

He worked harder than most of his peers just to do something they did automatically.

**That is not a parenting problem. That is a neurological one.**

And here is what I would like the church to recognize:

**My son knew the answer. He just couldn't express it the way the system expected.**

Read that again.

Because it is exactly what is happening in your congregation every single Sunday.

The neurodivergent person in the tower loves God.

They are engaged.

They are processing.

**They just can't express it the way your system expects.**

### **What Sunday Morning Actually Feels Like**

The greeter tries to hug them at the door.

Anxiety spikes – unexpected physical contact when they're already overwhelmed by the noise, the smells, the visual chaos of people everywhere.

They find a seat but the cushion texture feels wrong.

The perfume from the person next to them is making their head hurt.

The worship music is too loud and they can't filter out the competing sounds.

During the sermon they try to sit still but their body is screaming to move.

They doodle to help their brain focus.

Someone behind them tuts disapprovingly.

Then comes the "greet your neighbor" time and they want to disappear.

After the service everyone lingers for coffee.

They slip out.

People think they're antisocial.

They get home and crash.

**Not from worshiping God. From trying to fit into a system that wasn't designed for how their brain works.**

This is why some neurodivergent people stop coming to church.

**Not because they don't love God. Because church feels more like punishment than sanctuary.**

### **What We Get Wrong**

The church often treats neurodivergent isolation as a spiritual problem.

"Just be more social."

"Stop overthinking."

"If you just had more faith, this wouldn't be so hard."

These things can be true in certain contexts.

**But none of them address the actual struggle.**

And when neurodivergent people can't meet those expectations – or won't – we label them as prideful, rebellious, or spiritually immature.

**What we judge as behavioral problems are often neurological differences.**

And our judgment – the tuts, the eye rolls, the whispered comments – **drives neurodivergent people and their families away from the very community they desperately need.**

The answer isn't "try harder."

**The answer is that the church needs to change how it does community** so neurodivergent people can actually participate without destroying themselves in the process.

That means letting people wear headphones during loud worship.

Providing quiet spaces for those who are overloaded.

Not forcing physical contact.

Understanding that doodling or moving during the sermon isn't disrespect – **it's how some brains process.**

It means letting people connect through shared tasks instead of forced conversation.

It means patience with questions and processing time.

It means believing that **neurodivergence isn't a design flaw. It's design.**

1 Corinthians 12 says the body has many parts – not better or worse, just different.

And Psalm 139:13-14 says: "For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother's womb. I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made."

**That includes neurodivergent brains. God didn't make a mistake when He wired someone differently.**

### **The Tower Doesn't Have to Be Permanent**

The problem isn't the neurodivergent person.

**The problem is a church culture built exclusively for neurotypical brains.**

And when we refuse to adapt, we're the ones building the tower walls.

We're the ones creating the isolation.

**We're the ones causing church to be inaccessible.**

The tower doesn't have to be permanent.

But neurodivergent people won't come down from it until we make church a place worth coming down for.

A place where different doesn't mean defective.

A place where masks can come off.

**A place where sanctuary actually means safe.**

**To the church: stop mistaking the tower for pride. If neurodivergence is new territory for you, that's okay. Start by asking what we did to make them retreat there in the first place.**

In Part 2, I'll speak directly to the neurodivergent reader sitting in that tower right now.

In Part 3, I'll speak to the parents and guardians walking this journey alongside their children.

But that conversation starts here.

With us.

I don't have a checklist for you.

Honestly, the best place to start is simpler than any resource I could recommend.

**Ask the neurodivergent people already sitting in your congregation what they need or ask the parents of the neurodivergent children who no longer attend because they don't feel safe or welcome.**

They know.

They've always known.

They just haven't been asked.

And if you want to go deeper, there are faith-based resources specifically focused on neurodivergent inclusion in the church – a quick search will open that conversation further.

This is especially important for youth group and young adult leaders.

You may not realize you are alienating some of the very kids who desperately want to be part of what you're building.

**The neurodivergent don't want isolation. They want community.**

But when community is offered as only one option – one that increases their anxiety rather than relieving it – **they are trapped with few avenues of escape.**

The willingness to ask the question is already half the answer.

The church has always been at its best when it made room for everyone God made.

That includes the brains that work differently.

Jesus didn't say "come to me, all you who have it together."

He said: **"Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest."**  
(Matthew 11:28)

The neurodivergent person who exhausted themselves just getting through your Sunday service?

They are weary.

They are burdened.

They came.

Pastors, teachers, church leaders – **is this not also who Jesus was talking about.**

The question is whether they'll feel welcome enough to come back.

Please – make room.

---

### **If you're struggling:**

- Christian Faith-Based Resources: <https://mentalhealthhotline.org/christian-faith-resources/> or call 1-866-903-3787 (24/7)
- Crisis Text Line: Text HOME to 741741
- National Suicide Prevention Lifeline: 988 (call or text)

**You matter. The people you've misunderstood matter. Please welcome them.**

---

**William James Meyer is the author of "Do You Live in a Castle? Breaking Free from the Walls That Hold You Hostage." He writes from a Christian perspective as a father of neurodivergent children and as someone with similar traits himself, challenging the church to see the tower as protection, not pride.**

**Connect with him at [www.williamjamesmeyer.com](http://www.williamjamesmeyer.com)**