21 For the Parents, Guardians, and Friends Who Love Someone in the Tower (Part 3 of 3)

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Three weeks ago I wrote to the church about what they misunderstand when they see neurodivergent isolation as pride.

Last week I wrote directly to the neurodivergent reader sitting in the tower.

This week I want to speak to the people standing at the base of that tower – the ones who love someone up there and don't know how to reach them.

In my Mother's Day article I wrote about Dawn.

My wife. The mother of our children.

I wrote about how she set aside her career, stayed home, and built our neurodivergent children a sanctuary through years of homeschooling – tailoring her approach to each child's unique learning style, fighting for their confidence when the world might have labeled them as less than.

If you read that article about Dawn, maybe you recognized someone in your own life.

A parent who has been correcting behaviors they didn't understand.

A friend who has pulled back because the distance felt personal.

A sibling who grew up alongside a neurodivergent brother or sister and never had language for what they were watching.

This article is for you.

Whether you're a parent, a guardian, a friend, a sibling, or simply someone who loves a neurodivergent person and wants to understand them better –

this one's for you.

Because here's the truth that took me years to learn as a father:

You can't fix this for them.

But you can walk with them through it.

And sometimes that makes all the difference.

Stop Assuming. Start Asking.

When a neurodivergent person withdraws, the instinct of everyone around them is to correct it.

“Stop being antisocial.”

“You need to try harder.”

“Just go talk to people.”

“Why can't you just be normal?”

I understand that instinct.

You want them to belong.

You want them to have the friendships, the community, the easy connections that neurotypical people seem to have.

But for neurodivergent people, social connection isn't just harder.

It's fundamentally different.

Before you assume pride, difficulty, or antisocial behavior – ask what it actually feels like for them.

“What happens in your brain when you're in a room full of people?”

“What makes small talk so exhausting for you?”

“What would make this situation feel safer?”

Then listen.

Without fixing. Without correcting. Just listen.

Because what looks like pride from the outside is often survival from the inside.

Reframe What You're Seeing

Neurodivergent people do things that can look disrespectful, disengaged, or difficult.

But most of the time those behaviors are coping mechanisms, not character flaws.

They draw during the sermon – not because they're ignoring the teaching, but because their hands need to be busy while their mind processes what they're hearing.

They're taking it in. Just differently.

They can't sit still – not because they're being disrespectful, but because their body is neurologically wired to move.

They wear headphones during worship – not because they don't want to worship, but because the music volume is physically painful without them.

They leave immediately after church – not because they're unfriendly, but because they're completely overloaded and need to decompress before they melt down.

They cancel plans – not because they don't value the friendship, but because some days the energy required for social interaction simply isn't there.

They go quiet for days – not because they're angry at you, but because they're recovering from sensory or social overload.

They monopolize conversation – not because they're self-centered, but because they struggle to read the social cues that tell most people when to stop talking.

What you judge as behavioral problems are often neurological differences.

And when you correct, withdraw, or distance yourself without understanding what's driving those behaviors, you're not helping them grow.

You're teaching them that being themselves isn't safe around you.

The Cost of the Mask

Here's what happens when neurodivergent people don't feel safe to be themselves.

They mask.

They work incredibly hard to appear normal – to meet expectations, to perform neurotypical so well that no one can tell they're struggling.

If you read Part 2 of this series you know I've been there myself.

The masking is real. The exhaustion is real. I lived it for decades without knowing why.

That is what your neurodivergent child, friend, or loved one is carrying.

Every single day.

Your job isn't to teach them to mask better. It's to create space where they don't have to mask at all.

Let Them Connect Differently

Not everyone bonds the same way.

And one of the most loving things you can do for a neurodivergent person is stop expecting them to connect the way you do.

They might not bond through large group activities or casual conversation or age-based peer groups.

They might connect far better through shared tasks – working alongside someone rather than just talking to them.

Through one-on-one deep conversation rather than group settings.

Through online communities where they can process at their own pace without the sensory overwhelm of face-to-face interaction.

Don't dismiss those online friendships as "not real."

For many neurodivergent people, online community is where they first find people who speak their language.

That's not inferior.

That's just different.

If the small group isn't working, help them find a theology discussion circle or a service project or a book club.

If the youth group overwhelms them, look for smaller gatherings or one-on-one mentoring.

Your neurodivergent person's community might look nothing like what you expected.

That doesn't mean it's wrong.

It means it's theirs.

Advocate. Don't Apologize.

This one is especially for parents.

When your child melts down from sensory overload, can't sit still during the service, or needs to leave before the coffee hour –

don't apologize for them.

Advocate for them.

Talk to church leadership about sensory accommodations.

Ask about quiet spaces.

Request permission for headphones, movement, doodling during the sermon.

Educate the people who roll their eyes or whisper comments when your child doesn't behave neurotypically.

You don't owe anyone an apology for your child being neurodivergent.

But you do owe your child advocacy.

Be the voice they don't have yet.

And when people don't understand, educate them matter-of-factly:

"Their brain works differently. This is what helps them. This is what they need."

And for friends – advocacy looks different but matters just as much.

It means defending your neurodivergent friend when others misread them.

It means saying “that's not pride, that's how their brain works” when someone labels them wrongly.

It means showing up consistently even when they go quiet, even when they cancel, even when connection feels one-sided for a season.

Consistency is one of the most profound gifts you can give a neurodivergent person.

Because the world has taught them that people leave when they're “too much.”

You staying proves them wrong.

Don't Let Them Build Their Identity on Broken

Your neurodivergent child or friend has probably been told – directly or indirectly – that something is wrong with them.

And somewhere along the way they internalized it.

Don't let that become their identity.

Different doesn't mean defective.

God designed neurodivergent minds on purpose, with purpose.

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 their ADHD brain.

Their autistic brain.

Their brain that processes the world differently.

God didn't make a mistake when He wired them this way.

Your job – whether you're a parent, a guardian, or a friend – is to help them see their neurodivergence as design, not flaw.

Point out the gifts you see in them.

The pattern recognition.

The deep thinking.

The profound questions.

The intensity of focus when something captures their interest.

Don't just accommodate the struggles. Celebrate the gifts.

What You Can't Do. And What You Can.

You can't fix their brain to work neurotypically.

You can't protect them from every rejection and misunderstanding.

You can't cure their loneliness by pushing them to be more social.

But you can:

Believe them when they say they're struggling.

Create space where they don't have to mask around you.

Advocate loudly for their needs.

Help them find their people – even if those people look nothing like you expected.

Affirm their worth beyond social performance.

And point them to the God who designed them exactly as they are.

Be the Safe Place

In my book I describe the castle tower as the place neurodivergent people retreat to when the world becomes too much.

You can't tear down that tower for them.

But you can make yourself a place where the drawbridge comes down.

Where the storerooms of unprocessed pain can be emptied without judgment.

Where they don't have to retreat to the tower because they already feel safe with you.

Be that place.

Be the safe person.

Be the one who doesn't demand they perform neurotypical.

Be the one who stays.

And trust that God – who wired them this way, who designed them on purpose – knows exactly what He is doing.

The tower doesn't have to be permanent.

But they won't come down from it until they believe there's a place worth coming down for.

You can be that reason.

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 neurodivergent person you love matters. And the fact that you're reading this means they already have someone in their corner. Please stay.

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 a husband who has watched his wife build their children a sanctuary, one day at a time.

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