

May 28, 2007

In Response to Pastor Yadon:

I was appalled and extremely disappointed in your Religion Column “Only you can help your son, Dad, so put your career in second place.” Friday, May 26, 2007. I am one of the clinically trained psychological professionals who, in addition is, dually fellowship trained at the post-doctoral level in pediatric neuropsychology and developmental psychology, who you stated, “I would not attempt to demean.” You did demean my life work, but in a more offensive manner, you attempted to place blame and invoke shame on a family of a child with a diagnosed autism spectrum disorder (ASD). I will briefly attempt to inform you.

The National Institute of Mental Health states on their website www.nimh.nih.gov/autism states, “Customarily, an expert diagnostic team has the responsibility of thoroughly evaluating the child, assessing the child's unique strengths and weaknesses, and determining a formal diagnosis. The team will then meet with the parents to explain the results of the evaluation.” With these criteria in mind, I do not believe you are informed / educated in any manner to “wonder” about a diagnosis of medical professionals, even “having been around kids with those diagnoses” being in “ministry and education for 40 years.” These disorders are complex neurodevelopmental (genetic and environmental in nature) disorders that require entire teams of experts or specialists to attempt to understand and treat continuously over the lifespan of each individual with ASD.

These families which can include more than one individual with ASD, the families I am privileged enough to encounter every day, do not deserve your personal judgment, lack of understanding stated in a public forum, or opinion, to add to what the NIMH and other research refer to as simply “a devastating blow.”

Research performed at the University of Wisconsin-Madison by Marsha M. Seltzer, Ph.D. (2004) suggests that the significant increase in worry, financial strain, the individual with ASD not getting their needs met (communication), shortage of well-trained staff (clinical and school), having to always be “on-call”, diet, sleep, health, and hygiene are just a few increased stressors for individuals with ASD and other family members. It is unrealistic and unfair for even the medical / clinical professionals who see these individuals daily to assume that they understand this tremendous strain on the family system. I certainly cannot and will not!

This community needs to better understand individuals with ASD and support and encourage the families who courageously battle with differences in perception, lack of awareness, and unexpected emotional and behavioral responses from family members with ASD. It is my personal / clinical opinion that quality of life for families of persons with ASD can be dramatically improved if they are connected and supported within the community, but this will initially require much more understanding and acceptance at a community level.

Sincerely,

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