

Commentary: Wired differently on purpose, for a purpose

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Growing up in the church, I learned early that God does, in fact, love me. I gave my life to Christ early in life. But I didn't quite understand yet why God made me so "out of the box." And it would be a longer journey of learning to appreciate who and what God made me to be.

Ever since boyhood, I always felt different. Everything from the way I acted, the way I thought and the way I interacted with my own peers felt unusual. The mental balancing act, along with the social and emotional cues I had to keep up with, were enough to make me miserable at the end of the day.

Different

Growing up in the 1990s in East Dallas, I lived life like a seemingly regular kid. I loved my cartoons, comic books and video games. But I also had an interest in drawing comics, writing, newspapers, TV newscasts, TV broadcast graphics, news music themes and meteorology.

But when it came to other kids, there were some glaring differences in the ways I learned and interacted with information and with the world around me.

My peers were into pop culture. I was into current events.

My peers were into playground stuff. I was thinking about the future.

The differences I felt became painful, even a place of self-hatred.

I struggled into my adulthood with the question that hung over me like a cloud: “What’s wrong with me?”

Staying focused throughout a sermon at church was difficult, unless I was taking notes. The intense, yet melodic sounds of worship within my church were so loud, I intently sat as far away from loudspeakers as possible.

The older I got, the harder I worked to improve my understanding and communication skills as I went on to college. But I still felt like something was very wrong with me. Connecting with humans still felt foreign.

Learning about myself

Years later, my wife suggested I see a counselor. Those sessions later turned into tests. At age 37, I was late-diagnosed with ADHD and autism spectrum disorder. Everything started making sense.

The visits led to me “hyperfocusing,” which is an ADHD thing, on the topic for months, learning how ADHD had two subtypes—inattentive and hyperactive—and how some individuals have both. I began to understand my type—inattentive. The diagnosis explained my impulsivity, my emotions and my inability to focus on one thing.

As for autism, that explained my sensitivity to a variety of sounds, tastes, smells and touch. It also explained why I loved watching certain cartoons, comics and comic strips, local TV news, and old TV sitcoms. I used them to help me understand how to communicate with people.

Gifted and called

As I got involved in ministry, my ability to pick up on certain things within

the church from worship services to organizational matters within the fellowship made me a better servant leader.

I'm very particular about details when preparing Bible studies and sermons. I can be creative in how I serve within the church and outside the four walls. I enjoy keeping things in order and organized ... when I can, that is.

The Lord called me into ministry, writing and cartooning within the same year. It was 2005 when I got back into drawing again, focused more on my writing and learned the craft of writing a sermon.

As the years passed, the Lord would use my gifts and experiences to be able to advocate for autistic individuals and those with ADHD, as well as others who are marginalized and underrepresented. I speak out using my comics, articles and stories to convey a message that brings attention to an issue, as well as to share the gospel.

A number of years passed before I realized "nothing was wrong with me." It took a lot of prayer and a lot of time to process what I didn't know about myself. But I also saw myself in Christ.

Advocacy

One of the things you may hear from individuals with ADHD and autism is they often feel misunderstood. We can relate most to Christ in the sense that even those closest to him misunderstood him.

But the Christian walk for a person with ADHD and autism isn't always easy. I find myself wrestling with issues I'm sensitive to, like injustice. I do find myself wrestling daily with the fact there are some things that only make sense to God, not to me. And faith has to take the place of my desire to want certain things a specific way.

Discovering my neurodivergence also led me to be more compassionate toward others and to not be so hard on myself.

Other individuals with ADHD and autism have their own unique struggles. Autism is, in fact, a spectrum. So, lived experiences will vary.

The Lord used my late-diagnosis to show me how much he was able to do in and through me before I even had access to accommodations. He had enough grace and mercy to provide me with the resources I would need as life got more challenging.

Certainly, it would've been helpful to have a diagnosis when I was growing up, but I think the Lord showed me how important it was to advocate for others like me, especially those who need community and medical support now.

Celebrate

The unique, diverse gifts and talents that come from neurodivergent individuals are inexhaustible and always should be valued. They have a place in the kingdom of God, and they have a place in the body of Christ.

That's why, when I go to events to speak and present, I tell people, especially those who are neurodivergent, they are "wired differently on purpose, for a purpose!"

Kendall Lyons is a writer, minister and cartoonist who publishes on his Substack page [Kendall's Comics](#). He is also the illustrator of [Your Identity in Christ: Finding Who You Are in Who He Is](#) by David Sanchez. The views expressed in this opinion article are those of the author.