

Fair, not Equal

My middle son stated sternly, “That’s not fair that I have to do an art and my brother doesn’t!” His art, ballroom dancing, is a commitment we have encouraged for many reasons. He has a unique opportunity because he is the same age as the dance studio owners’ son which means he has been a part of a child’s ballroom dancing class since its inception when he turned five, he is very good at it and we believe in balance between arts (dance, musical instruments, singing, etc.) and sports, allowing one each at any point in the year for each of our kids once they are in Kindergarten. My oldest son, my son with ADHD, has not yet been involved in an art. Only sports.

My middle son, in his seven-year-old logic, pointed out his disdain for this imbalance, this inequality. As a mom of three unique children, I had to carefully respond to this. You see, my oldest needs sports to help him focus and channel his energy in a positive and confidence building way. He does not excel in school, like my middle son does. My oldest son also bites his fingernails. To the quick. And he wants to play the guitar as his “art.” Last time he tried to strum a guitar, his fingers bled, he got upset, then angry...then I had to spend the rest of the afternoon calming him down. He is also very argumentative and picks fights with me all.day.long. I have to choose my battles. And, forcing an “art” at this age has not been one of them. But...I do with my middle son.

There is a saying often used in education, “Fair is not equal.” The very basic premise is that fair is ensuring that every student receives what he or she needs. It means meeting individual students right where they are and providing the support that each student needs. Those needs look very different. If my son, who has an IEP, receives extra help with reading because he has not been able to meet grade specific bench marks, that may not be equal (he is getting more help) but it is fair. In the same way, the student sitting next to him, though he might night get reading assistance, might get extra math beyond his grade level to make sure that he is challenged to reach his full potential.

God made each of us so differently, so unique. He crafted our children, every part of our them and every part of us. Can you imagine if we were all completely equal – the same? There would not be star baseball players, world champion ball room dancers, expert carpenters, joy-filled mailmen, pastry chefs capable of crafting masterpieces out of sugar. We would all be good at the same things and there would be no diversity.

Just as in education, in our homes “fair is not equal.” I explained this to my seven-year-old. My oldest son will do an art, when it is time...for him. I will provide what each of my unique children need, even if it might not seem fair. What is fair, is that I love each of them for who they are and who God made them to be. I will not shame my middle son for not being the athlete that my oldest son is, nor will I force my oldest son to do his art now when he is battling other things, that my middle is not. Fair may not be equal, and that is ok, but my love and care for each individual child God has given me will be guided by discernment, seeking of God’s wisdom and as loving as this mama can make it.

This quote does not mean my middle son will not get what HE needs...it means that it might not be the same as his brother. Both of their needs will be met, and my little four-year-old girl’s needs too... God meets our needs, He meets them right where we are. And, He meets our needs as parents of children with special needs. God is all knowing, all seeing and loves us each uniquely and justly. He made everyone unique, not the same...or in other words...equal. And that is fair in His economy, where all part of the body are needed to proclaim His word and grow His kingdom.

“You can be sure that God will take care of everything you need, his generosity exceeding even yours in the glory that pours from Jesus. Our God and Father abounds in glory that just pours out into eternity. Yes.” Philippians 4:19, The Message

“As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace: whoever speaks, as one who speaks oracles of God; whoever serves, as one who serves by the strength that God supplies—in order that in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ. To him belong glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.” 1 Peter 4:10-11