



Responsiveness to Special Needs

Devotional featuring Elizabeth Dombrowski

So often special education is seen as something “special”, something only available to a few, an additional program that only the largest Christian schools with the most resources can afford. But all of our students and all of our schools are all special, right? We all have a role to play in God’s kingdom, as the gospels and the New Testament teach us over and over again. There are so many places where Jesus reaches out to the least appreciated members of society, treating everyone with respect and belonging.

We like to think of ourselves and pink and green puzzle pieces, knowing that God knit each one of us together as his child. The greens represent our strengths, and the pinks represent our weaknesses. And we are shaped as the body of Christ to fit together in community. When one piece is missing, we all miss out. No one is made up entirely of green parts. No one is made up entirely of pink parts either, even though that might be all that society sees. Each person is necessary and has gifts and needs to share. So if everyone, truly everyone, is special to God, then we should play on our faith communities around that expectation. One in every five people in America has a disability of some kind. We need to plan with the expectation of differences and disability.



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We use two approaching frameworks to understand our society’s reaction to difference. The first and most popular framework is the medical model of disability, which claims that disability - or difference from our norms - is something to be fixed.

The opposing model to this is the social model of disability, which posits that all abilities are a natural extension of the human condition. And it is the design of our society, our schools, and buildings which create a disability for individuals. Both of these frameworks continue to shape the experience of students who struggle in our schools. As Christian schools, we can meet the needs of individuals with disabilities. We can be a community of belonging, where we expect and plan for differences so that we can receive gifts that God has knit into each person. This changes the culture of our Christian schools and becomes counter-cultural, and it’s a demonstration of faithfulness. So how can you expect greater diversity disability and difference in your school today?

MEDITATE

“But God has combined the members of the body and has given greater honor to the parts that lacked it, so that there should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other.” —1 CORINTHIANS 12:22-25 NIV

REFLECT

What do we learn about God in 1 Corinthians 12:24b-25?

How can you more resemble Jesus’ example and receive the giftings of all of our students?

What framework most reflects how our school views and incorporates differences?