

Special Needs, Indeed

"Hello, everybody, so glad to see you," sings Ms. Katie as she rocks and strums her guitar. From dancing with scarves, magically blowing out the lights, and animating a parachute, my children love the *Music Together* classes we attend. As I find a place in the circle, I gaze at the mothers around me. Sometimes noticing their unique outfits or their hip hairstyles, but mostly admiring their calm. I observe their behavior to uncover what it is that makes their children sit so serenely in their laps. I admire their effortless poise.

Meanwhile, my two children prance around the room either pulling on noses or pulling off glasses. As I rush to rescue the dad donning a baseball cap currently enduring Lukas' stranglehold, Sarah darts off to strum a guitar she is not supposed to touch. I do not have any poise. Instead, I have a sweaty upper lip and a growing agitation.

The end result is that I just want to stay home, protected, and away from any potentially judging eyes. "Hide him under a bushel...No!" The volume of Lukas' theme song dims in my heart during moments like these. My two hands are not enough to wrangle my children in, and my feet trip over themselves as I assess who to grab first. Everyone can see I need extra help with my children, but that dependency makes me feel broken and ready to hide.

In her stunning book *The Broken Way*, Ann Voskamp delves into brokenness. As she laments her own brokenness, her husband, The Farmer, shares what the fields have taught him. "The seed breaks to give us the wheat. The soil breaks to give us the crop, the sky breaks to give us the rain, the wheat breaks to give us the bread. And the bread breaks to give us the feast. There was once even an alabaster jar that broke to give Him all the glory...Never be afraid of being a broken thing." I could see from his examples that brokenness always led to something greater. Instead of setting my eyes on what felt cracked within me, I needed to shift my focus to what it yielded, the abundance born out of my need.

I started by thinking about Lukas' neediness. My battle cry is to never let him see dependency as an occasion for shame. I want to encourage him to engage with the world in the midst of his needs. Yet there I was wanting to run and hide when my own needs confronted me.

God suggests a better way. Our needs are not an *occasion to escape* other people, but an *opportunity to engage* with other people.

My hope as a mother is to help Lukas see that he may have to rely on others, but that is part of the beauty found in his story. To be a “special needs” child is not a label of failure, it is rather an invitation to build a community around him. To choose to see onlooking eyes as empathetic. To truly see our need as something that brings out the best in others and even the best in us.

I may not be the mother in the circle that is refined and still, but I am the mother who is spurred to connect with more people. I meet the dad wearing the baseball hat, have extended conversations with the teacher, and thank the mom who helped me chase down one of my kids. The Farmer is right; abundance awaits us. Our needs are weaving our lives together so we can experience deeper community.

I can't tell Lukas I see the beauty in his needs unless I am willing to start seeing that beauty in my own. I have special needs, indeed!