



## Q & A



### ***When I Go to Church, I Belong*** *Finding My Place in God's Family as a Child with Special Needs*

September 19, 2023 | \$18, 32 pages, hardcover | 978-1-5140-0667-2

**Elrena Evans** is an author, an editor, a mother, a wife, a dancer, and a stand-up comedian. Her books *When I Go to Church, I Belong* and *Special Grace: Prayers and Reflections for Families with Special Needs* are both inspired by her experience as a mom of children with special needs. Elrena lives in Pennsylvania with her husband and their five children. She doesn't have a favorite ice cream flavor because she loves (almost) all of them.

## New from the Author of *Special Grace*

### What prompted you to write this book?

**Elrena Evans:** When IVP reached out to me to consider writing this book, I was absolutely thrilled. I am so passionate about advocating for children with special needs (hence my book *Special Grace*). How wonderful to be given an opportunity to write a book about welcoming ALL God's children into church! Both to celebrate the welcome that already exists and to gently cast a prophetic vision for ways we can be even more welcoming to little ones with special needs.

### What is distinctive about this idea or your approach?

**Elrena:** *When I Go to Church, I Belong* tells the story of six different children with special needs, as they go to church and find they are welcome there. Told in the voices of the children, the simple language and beautiful illustrations convey an important message: You belong here. All belong here. All are welcome in God's family.

### What do you want readers to take away from this book?

**Elrena:**

1. I want children with special needs, and caregivers of children with special needs, to feel seen—to see themselves and their stories represented in the book.
2. I want children who don't have special needs, and their caregivers, to become curious about welcoming those with special needs into their faith communities.
3. I want children to resonate emotionally with the characters in the story—because I believe shared empathy can be the first step toward friendship and true belonging.
4. I want pastors, Sunday school teachers, and other church workers to be encouraged to think about ways their own churches can become more welcoming.
5. I want people reading or hearing the book to enjoy it and have fun with the story!



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**Anna Tjernstrom**, IVP Kids reviews  
800.843.4587 ext. 4019 or [atjernstrom@ivpress.com](mailto:atjernstrom@ivpress.com)

**Krista Clayton**, author interviews  
800.843.4587 ext. 4013 or [kcayton@ivpress.com](mailto:kcayton@ivpress.com)



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**Rebecca Evans** is an author and illustrator who has worked on over two dozen children's books, including *When I Go to Church, I Belong* and *All Will Be Well*. She also enjoys teaching art at her local art center, publishing artwork with magazines and multiple publishing houses, and sharing her love of literature and art with children. Rebecca lives in Maryland and enjoys spending time with her husband and their children and working from her home studio.

## **New From the Illustrator of *All Will Be Well***

### **What has it been like illustrating *When I Go to Church, I Belong*?**

**Rebecca Evans:** Illustrating *When I Go to Church, I Belong* has been a new kind of challenge for me. I never knew how much I *didn't* know about the struggles differently abled people have until I began work on this book. It really forced me to take a hard look at what I thought I knew and then admit I needed help! I reached out to a number of friends who had experience with these types of situations to get their input before I even began drawing. And then once the sketches were done, I reached out again to make sure I'd gotten it right! I'm glad that I did because it turns out I still didn't have it right and needed to go back in and make additional edits. The last thing I ever want to do is misrepresent someone or something I'm illustrating. There was a lot of research that went into making sure I represented every situation in an honest way and didn't perpetuate any stereotypes.

### **What message would you like children and adult readers to see through your illustrations?**

**Rebecca:** The biggest thing I'd like readers to see in the illustrations is the togetherness of all the people. There are a lot of crowd scenes in this book purposefully! I wanted to show love, acceptance, and friendship with many people, not just a few. I wanted to show how we all belong together as part of God's kingdom.

### **Is there anything you would like to share about the creative process?**

**Rebecca:** I think this book was a harder book for me to draw because of what I wanted it to show. I don't think I've ever done so many crowd scenes with so many people! And I wanted to make sure the people were all unique and special, just the way God created us all to be. I wanted to show the beauty of the tapestry that is God's church. It was an exhausting and exhilarating process.

### **What else you would like us to notice in the illustrations?**

**Rebecca:** Look at all the different kinds of families in this book, the people loving each other in so many different situations! Look at the beauty of neighbors loving neighbors and friends loving friends no matter how different or alike they are! Then take that love into your own life and into your own neighborhood!



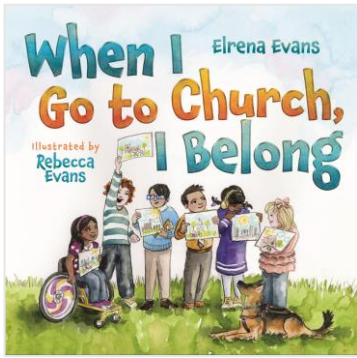
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## BIO



### ***When I Go to Church, I Belong*** *Finding My Place in God's Family as a Child with Special Needs*

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Children with disabilities often struggle to fit in, but church can be a place where everyone is welcome and included! This beautifully illustrated children's book follows the story of six children, helping us better understand the experiences and feelings of those with special needs. And it reminds us that even though we have our differences, we also have so much in common.



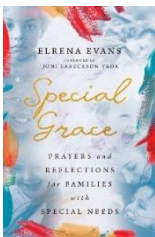
**Elrena Evans** (MFA, Penn State) is an author, an editor, a mother, a wife, a dancer, and a stand-up comedian. Her books *When I Go to Church, I Belong* and *Special Grace: Prayers and Reflections for Families with Special Needs* are both inspired by her experience as a mom of children with special needs.

Elrena is executive editor of *Paper&String*, a digital care package celebrating faith, creativity, and beauty in its many forms. She is the author of a short story collection, *This Crowded Night*, and coauthor of the essay collection *Mama, PhD: Women Write About Motherhood and Academic Life*. Elrena lives in Pennsylvania with her husband and their five children. And she doesn't have a favorite ice cream flavor because she loves (almost) all of them.



**Rebecca Evans** is an author and illustrator who has worked on over two dozen children's books, including *When I Go to Church, I Belong* and *All Will Be Well*. She also enjoys teaching art at her local art center, publishing artwork with magazines and multiple publishing houses, and sharing her love of literature and art with children. Rebecca lives in Maryland and enjoys spending time with her husband and their children and working from her home studio.

Also by Elrena Evans:



***Special Grace: Prayers and Reflections for Families with Special Needs***  
April 12, 2022 | \$16, 128 pages, paperback | 978-1-5140-0351-0

Filled with humor and wisdom, this collection of 127 prayers touches on all aspects of family life with special needs. Each prayer is set off by a reflective essay from author Elrena Evans's own family life. These prayers and reflections will help special needs families process their experiences together and offer them to God with hope and simple trust.



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