



WHAT IS... EQUITY



DEFINITION:

EQUITY IS defined by the National Association of Colleges and Employers as “the quality of being fair and just; recognizing that we do not all start from the same place and must acknowledge and make adjustments to imbalances.” Equity often affects access – access to basic human rights, food, and other resources. Often, “differences like race, age, socio-economic status, mobility, gender, or sexual orientation determine access to resources, mediate success, or designate one’s level of inclusion and well-being.”¹

Equity is often confused with equality. Equality assumes that we all begin at the same starting place and the rules are the same for everyone. Equity begins with acknowledging the differences and asking the question, “How can we provide everyone with access?” We acknowledge that due to barriers some people or groups will need more resources so they can have a similar starting place to those to whom privilege has already been given.



BIBLICAL/SPIRITUAL/THEOLOGICAL FRAMING OR REFERENCES:

EQUITY IS THE OUTCOME of our deep and intentional practice of radical hospitality and loving one another – especially in our differences – as God’s beloved creation. As disciples of Jesus, we strive for equity because the Holy Other – God – came down to us forsaking divine identity to redeem humanity, reconciling us to God.

The book of James, in the New Testament, provides a quick and clear description of how we are to treat God and our neighbors. For James, equity for followers of Jesus is created with two words that hang together throughout the letter: word and action. James takes the wealthy to task in chapter five for being inequitable in their treatment of their workers. This action, as James states, does not please God. James 5:4-6 says:

“Listen! Hear the cries of the wages in your field hands. These are the wages you stole from those who harvested your fields. The cries of the harvesters have reached the ears of the Lord of heavenly forces. You have lived a self-satisfying life on this earth, a life of luxury. You have stuffed your hearts in preparation for the day of slaughter. You have condemned and murdered the righteous one, who doesn’t oppose you.”

This inequitable treatment of neighbor does not reflect the heart of God and dishonors the Creator of all who calls us to be like Jesus. “As Christians, we believe that the Kin-dom of God, the Beloved Community in its fullest, will allow every single one of us to live with the dignity and worth true equality would afford, that which God intends and we desperately long for. Until then, we do the work of equity that it may one day be so.”²

¹ & ² Adapted from [Equity vs. Equality: Understanding the Differences - R-Squared \(r2hub.org\)](https://www.r2hub.org/Equity-vs.-Equality-Understanding-the-Differences-R-Squared)



WHAT IS... EQUITY



EXAMPLE(S):

EXAMPLE(S) OF EQUITY INCLUDE:

Equity says the following:³

- "There are historic, systemic, and ongoing inequities in our political, economic, educational, health, religious, and other systems, where discrimination 'lives' within the structures themselves."
- "Even if the rules of the game are the same, the game itself privileges some at the expense of others."
- "Oppressions (racism, classism, ageism, etc.) will end when we address and dismantle the assumptions, values, and systems of oppression which actively resist treating all persons with dignity and respect."
- "Everyone's right to vote is protected and their access to voting is promoted. For example, no one must travel an unreasonable distance to reach a voting station, workers are given paid time off to vote, everyone has a ballot in their language, etc."
- "We can eradicate racism by both 'doing no harm' and by 'doing good' i.e. racism will end when we actively work to stop the actions that lead to racial injustice and when we engage in the work of dismantling its root causes."

Two concrete examples of equity are:

- Five people of varying heights have signed up to participate in a cycling fundraiser event sponsored by a local church. The two shorter people struggle with riding the standard-sized bicycles the church has provided. Therefore, they tell the event organizer they cannot participate because the bicycle does not fit their needs. The event organizer, in concert with the organizing team and two participants, finds and provides bicycles for the two shorter participants to ride.
- Citizens in a local town all have equal voting rights. However, some senior residents in the town cannot exercise their right to vote during elections. They live too far from their polling place and do not have transportation to drive there. Some of the senior residents no longer drive. The town organizes transportation support, prior to their town elections, so the senior residents can vote.

³ Adapted from [Equity vs. Equality: Understanding the Differences - R-Squared \(r2hub.org\)](https://www.r2hub.org/Equity-vs-Equality-Understanding-the-Differences-R-Squared)

WHAT IS... EQUITY

REFLECTION:

QUESTION #1

Why is access important when talking about equity?



QUESTION #2

Reflect on a time when you were invited to a gathering and did not have what you needed to fully participate? How did you feel?



QUESTION #3

How is equity connected to hospitality and honoring the image of God in our neighbor?



ADDITIONAL RESOURCES:

EQUITY VS. EQUALITY: UNDERSTANDING THE DIFFERENCES (FROM GCORR)
<https://www.r2hub.org/library/equity-vs-equality>

NAME THAT FEELING: A GROUP EXERCISE (FROM GCORR)
<https://www.r2hub.org/library/name-that-feeling>

EQUITY VS. EQUALITY (FROM THE ROBERT WOOD JOHNSON FOUNDATION)
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MLXZyNtaoDM>