

# From Here to There

A look at exclusion,  
the kingdom  
and young people  
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Spiritual Development Project

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# Introduction

Over the last few years the issues of social exclusion and social inclusion have come into more and more people's thinking across the political spectrum, in the work place, the school and the church. At the same time the gap between those who have and those who have not has continued to widen both globally and in the UK.

All too often, the church has remained silent on many of the issues associated with exclusion. The church in the UK has become associated with middle class values and has done little to combat the materialistic spirit which dominates our culture. This has alienated those at risk of being excluded from society and from church. It must be questioned whether the good news we have really has been for the poor.

Young people in general have voted with their feet and left the church in large numbers. Those young people who may be considered socially excluded are few and far between in lists of church members.

The aim of this brief booklet is to:

- Highlight some of the issues around exclusion and young people
- Consider how Jesus treated those at risk of being excluded
- Present ways of enabling the church in the UK to be 'good news' to the excluded
- Present ideas and starting points for discussion, reflection and further study.

During April -June 2000, the Connect Spiritual Development Project undertook a nationwide series of consultations on *The Kingdom, Excluded Young People and Spirituality*. Over 250 youth workers, project workers, ministers, teachers and other interested parties took part and much of the material contained in these pages is as a result of the dialogue which took place.

# What do we mean by the term ‘Excluded’?

*“You can quote statistics and rattle off human tragedy with ease when thinking of the social issues of the world, especially those that surround addiction, prostitution and displacement. But it isn’t the issues that are most alarming as you meet brokenness or reflect on the world. It is the world itself that is alarming..... the world that has spun so far from its central focus.”*

*Simon Chaplin*

Before commencing a discussion on the subject of exclusion it may be useful to attempt defining what is meant by the term exclusion. The consultation brainstormed possible answers to the question, ‘What do we mean by exclusion?’. The following is a collection of the answers given.

## **Those excluded are seen as:**

- |                                                   |                                    |
|---------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| - <b>not belonging</b>                            | - <b>being without choices</b>     |
| - <b>not conforming</b>                           | - <b>unloved</b>                   |
| - <b>unimportant and insignificant to society</b> | - <b>pushed out</b>                |
| - <b>different</b>                                | - <b>not being involved</b>        |
| - <b>not part of mainstream society</b>           | - <b>isolated</b>                  |
| - <b>helpless and hopelessly isolated</b>         | - <b>not accepted</b>              |
| - <b>separated from others</b>                    | - <b>dropping out from society</b> |
| - <b>out of it!</b>                               | - <b>not fitting in</b>            |
| - <b>something or someone not wanted</b>          | - <b>on the outside</b>            |

Jim Punton was one of the most influential people in the history of Frontier Youth Trust. Amongst many qualities, he was known for his depth of study and the revelation it brought. This is highlighted by the following brief word study on the subject of ‘The Poor’.

Whenever the word ‘poor’ is mentioned it is quite likely that we simply suppose that this refers to economic situations. Our Bible translators have not always helped us gain a complete understanding of what ‘poor’ means.

In the Old Testament the poor are described as:

Oppressed, downtrodden and humiliated - *Hebrew ana, ani, anaw*

Powerless and diminished - *dalal, dal, dalla*

Yearning and insistent - *aba, abiyona, ebyon*

Defenceless and open to exploitation - *halak, heleka*

Needy and in want - *haser, mahsor*

Subjected and dependent - *sakan, soken, misken*

Diminished and impoverished - *muk*

Destitute and bereft - *rush, rash, resh*

Dispossessed and evicted - *yarash*

Similarly in the New Testament they are described as:

The destitute  
The manual worker struggling to survive  
The beggar  
The one reduced to 'meekness'  
The one brought low  
The weak  
The leper  
The heavy laden  
The fatherless  
The widow  
The common people.

Perhaps these words studied by Jim, give us a greater understanding and a more appropriate definition of what it means to be excluded.

## Personal and Group Work Questions

- **Who are the excluded in your neighbourhood?**
- **Is it helpful to define those who may be excluded, or does this just alienate individuals further?**
- **When we talk about issues surrounding exclusion, how can we avoid boxing people into a 'them and us' situation?**
- **Discuss the following: 'Social inclusion is becoming a politically attractive concept not least because it diverts attention away from the possible need for radical change and encourages compliance with the status quo'**
- **Piconne (1995) has referred to inclusion as the 'liberal snake oil prescribed for all social ills by those who uncritically assume the existing system to be fundamentally sound'. To what extent do you agree with this statement?**

# Who are the young people at risk of being excluded?

The question was asked, “Who are the young people at risk of being excluded?” The answers varied from small groups of individuals with particular social and/or economic needs/problems to an all encompassing ‘all young people’. Whilst the answer to this question probably lies somewhere in between these two extremes, the following list is a summary of the findings.

- those from ethnic minorities
- drug addicts
- refugees/assylum seekers
- disabled
- the different (e.g. artistic boys)
- the bullied
- the fat
- the short
- the poor
- non academic
- those with learning difficulties
- academic
- homosexual
- non sporty
- children form single parent families
- pregnant teenagers/teenage parents
- young offenders
- those in a life of crime
- non trendy
- adopted
- long term unemployed
- christian young people
- spotty
- disadvantaged
- those with eating disorders
- those in care
- those with Aids
- orphans
- travellers
- “kids from my estate”
- the addicted
- those lacking life and social skills
- the illiterate
- those with behavioural problems
- those with mental health problems
- homeless

Those who work with young people regularly, know the cost of an individual being excluded from a group of friends, a class or society as a whole. The resulting sense of rejection can all too quickly lead to feelings of failure, inadequacy, despair, hopelessness and powerlessness.

Perhaps this is demonstrated no more widely than when an individual is permanently excluded from school.

## Personal and Group Work Questions

- **It has been suggested that all young people are excluded. To what extent do you agree with this statement?**
- **De Haan suggests that 'notions of what exclusion means depends on what form of inclusion is deemed important in specific societies or by specific groups'. Does how we spend our money, run our church services and ministries, and value our young people have anything to say about to what extent young people are excluded from our churches?**
- **For those of us in church, how can we prevent young people feeling excluded?**

# School Exclusion

Excluding children and young people from school is costly. Not only is it costly in financial terms but the social, educational and emotional costs for the excluded pupil, the school and society as a whole are considerable.

A survey by the Children's Society estimated that fixed-term (temporary) exclusions are running at 137,000 pupils per year with the loss of over 2 million days of education. During 1998-99, there were 10,404 pupils permanently excluded from schools.

## The Cost of Exclusion

It is clear that exclusion from school is a very serious issue and is treated as such by headteachers and governors. OFSTED has stated that "For the pupil concerned, it (exclusion) may well constitute a critical turn in a downward spiral leading to unemployability, anomie and hopelessness."<sup>1</sup>

The Government established Social Exclusion Unit (SEU) published a report in May 1998 'Truancy and School Exclusion'<sup>2</sup>. The report highlighted that 25% of young people aged 14-16 in public care are either excluded or not attending school. 75% of this group leave school with no qualifications. They are 4 times more likely to be unemployed, 50 times more likely to serve time in prison and 60 times more likely to be homeless.

In Nottinghamshire, 8% of detected crime committed by juvenile offenders takes place during school hours.<sup>3</sup> Whilst it is not possible (due to lack of researched database information) to categorically state that all of this crime is committed by excluded pupils, there is little doubt that those excluded from school are more likely to become involved in criminal activities during these day time periods than if they were still attending school.

According to work undertaken by Dr. Carl Parsons, it has been concluded that less than 40 per cent of excluded pupils return to mainstream school. His stated belief is that permanent exclusion is "counter productive, unjust, costly and damaging to both the individual and the fabric of society."<sup>4</sup>

The Audit Commission's Report 'Misspent Youth'<sup>5</sup> identifies a number of factors likely to increase the risk of young people offending.

- Inadequate parenting
- Aggressive, hyperactive behaviour
- Truancy and exclusions
- Peer group pressure
- Unstable living conditions
- Lack of training and employment
- Drugs and alcohol abuse

The conclusion drawn is that the more of these factors a young person encounters, the more likely they are to commit crime.

Often teachers are in an impossible position. It may be just one individual or half a dozen pupils who are disrupting an entire class of thirty. Should the teacher remove the individual offenders for the sake of the majority or allow them to stay in the class and impede everyone's education? These are the daily dilemmas teachers face.

Although excluding individuals from schools might have benefits for the individual class or school, the problems seem to be diverted to the community in the form of increased juvenile criminality. Typically, one burglary often requires repairs or replacement to doors and windows, there is substantial police time involved, with locksmiths and other contractors involved. If an offender is arrested there are further police enquiries, statement taking, interviews, preparation of court papers, involvement of Social Services, appropriate adults and, if the matter goes to court, there are court and perhaps even prison costs.

*“Home Office research suggests around 60 per cent of those excluded from school go on to become young offenders - in fact the cautioned and/or convicted figure may be higher. The NACRO report Wasted Lives (1998) estimates the average response cost in dealing with the behaviour of a young offender to be around £25,000 (made up of prosecution, incarceration and supervision costs as well as family intervention and care).”*

*Report of Policy Action Team 12: Young People. Crown Copyright*

If these costs were the only ones involved they would be considerable. However, many who are permanently excluded from school leave with few, if any, qualifications. Because of this they are less likely to realise their potential, have reduced chances of gaining employment and may not make the contribution to society which they might otherwise have made.

Opportunities are lost, self-esteem is damaged, social and welfare bills rise and tax revenues will not be realised. All in all, the cost of preventing exclusions from school is undoubtedly less than the cost of the present system which sees a consistently high number of exclusions.

## **Understanding Behaviour**

Early intervention is essential for those who are at risk of being excluded. The key tasks involved in this intervention would be to include not exclude those disaffected young people concerned, challenge, motivate and teach them key skills in order to prevent the double jeopardy of firstly being excluded from the primary source of learning - the school, and secondly, almost certainly reducing further their opportunity for learning in the future.<sup>6</sup>

Teacher observation, youth work experience, parental challenges and crime statistics<sup>7</sup> indicate that there are some reoccurring factors in the lives of those young people who are in danger of being marginalised by exclusion from school.

All too often these young people experience:

- low income and poor housing
- poor parental supervision and harsh and erratic discipline

- parental conflict and broken families
- impulsiveness and hyperactivity

Teachers and youth workers observe that these background factors evidence themselves in at risk young people via:

- attention seeking tendencies
- little understanding of appropriate social behaviour and boundaries
- experimentation with alcohol and drugs

Teachers have commented that many of the young people who are at risk of exclusion need more individual attention, someone to help them handle conflict, develop anger management skills and be a positive role model for them.

A balance must be sought between recognising that many of these young people need to change their behaviour patterns and become fully participative members of the school whilst acknowledging that many of them are carrying hurts, emotional traumas and anger.

The Social Exclusion Unit<sup>8</sup> details what it believes to be the best approaches to ensure that exclusion situations are prevented and where necessary dealt with quickly. They are:

- unambiguous rules, a clear hierarchy of sanctions, applied consistently when the rules are broken. Parents staff and governors need to stand shoulder to shoulder on discipline, and children need to be in no doubt about the consequences of bad behaviour. Where this is done, schools see fewer disruptive incidents, and more class time is spent learning;
- behavioral problems need to be identified at primary school or early secondary school and teachers need to be well trained in behaviour management with an equal opportunities perspective;
- where, necessary, help available quickly from specialists, perhaps educational psychology service or child and adolescent mental health services;
- good arrangements for sharing information between services and for joint working more generally, overcoming agency and professional boundaries;
- early involvement of parents, good community links, role modeling and mentors;
- a more flexible and creative approach to the curriculum, particularly for older children.

The Commons Select Committee on Education and Employment (*Disaffected Young People April 1998*) reports that “the great strength of such interventions lies in the personal attention received by disaffected young people and the strong professional commitment to their needs.”

It may be that the recent resources put into schools to tackle the problem of exclusion and the new Connexions Service with its Personal Advisors for young people, will help those most at risk. What is clear is that a massive injection of resources is needed to intervene much earlier in the lives of those young people affected.

Christians are often good at saying that every individual is made in the image of God. The problem with excluding any young person is that we run the risk of excluding someone very precious whom God has taken a delight in creating. At the same time we cannot sit back and blame teachers for something which is a society-wide problem, a problem that needs serious attention from everybody, including the church.

It would seem unlikely that schools can solve these problems on their own. Many of the problems are not school related and perhaps a more personalised curriculum approach would help some young people deal with the situations they find themselves in. Not all school exclusions are as a direct result of bad behaviour. Some young people simply behave differently to what is expected and we must be able to distinguish between bad and unacceptable behaviour and 'different' behaviour.

Those who behave 'differently' need a different approach. More vocational education and learning with an arts, hands on, creative approach would better serve many young people at risk. May be it is time to think about our philosophy of education and not just the mechanics, perhaps above all, we need to take a fresh look at Jesus and the Kingdom He proclaimed in order to have a fuller understanding of the situation.

#### Notes

1. Exclusions from Secondary Schools, 1995-96 OFSTED 1996 paragraph 26
2. Truancy and School Exclusion. ISBN 0-10-139572-8.
3. Juvenile Coordinating Officer, West Bridgford Police, Nottingham. 1997 Statistics.
4. Exclusions From School - The Public Cost. Dr. C Parsons. Nov. 1996
5. 'Misspent Youth' Audit Commission 1997.
7. Tackling Disaffection. 25. Commons Select Committee Education & Employment. April 1998
8. The Joseph Rowntree Foundation Social Policy Research Paper 93. April 1996.
9. Social Exclusion Unit Presentation to Parliament. May 1998

#### Personal and Group Work Questions

- **Is it ever right to ever exclude a pupil from school?**
- **Is the answer different for a christian school or if a teacher/head teacher is a christian?**
- **We have become very focused on a range of core subjects (English, maths, languages, humanities, sciences) at the expense of other subjects (music, art, creative subjects). What would happen if we reversed this process?**
- **What alternatives could be found to school exclusions?**

# What does God say about exclusion and the kingdom?

One of the things which must always be borne in mind is that we have to do our theology in the context of a culture. Our present culture is far removed from the one we see in the Gospels and the values we see encompassed in the Kingdom are very different to those we see around us.

## **Culture and Kingdom**

The findings of the consultation have revealed a diversity of opinion regarding today's cultural values. Indeed, it could be said that this lack of clarity about our values today, is a cultural value in itself. In contrast, there has been consistency in identifying the values of the Gospel.

<b>Today's Cultural Values</b>	<b>Gospel Kingdom Values</b>
Money and Materialism	Forgiveness
Individualism	Love
Image	Hope
Success	Justice
Immediacy	Truth
Choice	Acceptance
Satisfaction	Unity
Rights	Community
Freedom	Others
Technology	Care
Relative truth	Respect
Me	Family
Superficiality	Inclusiveness
Information overload	God centred
Entertainment	Giving
Globalisation	Creation
Anything goes	Serving
Fragmentation	Humility

A brief glance at these two lists will immediately highlight the differences between the two sets of values. As Christians, in what could be said to be an alien culture, we need to make sure that we are living by Kingdom values and not by the values of those who live around us. This is what makes us distinctive.

To find the Kingdom of God is the goal of every Christian. It is the place which exists wherever God's rule extends. It has a past, present, and a future and is the focal theme of scripture. Rather than it being where the journey into the Kingdom begins, the conversion experience is where the journey ends for too many believers. Many of us may pray 'Let Your Kingdom come' but far fewer of us actively 'seek first the Kingdom' on a daily lived out basis.

## **Scripture and Kingdom**

In the Gospel of Matthew the Kingdom is compared to:

- a man who sowed good seed (Matt 13:24-30)
- a grain of mustard seed (Mat 13:31-32)
- leaven (Matt 13:33)
- a treasure (Matt 13:44)
- a pearl (Matt 13:45)
- a net (Matt 13:47-50)
- a king who called his servants to reckoning (Matt 18:23-35)
- a house owner (Matt 20:1-16)
- a king who made a marriage feast for his son (Matt 22:2-14)
- ten virgins (Matt 25:1-13)
- a man travelling into a far country (Matt 25:14-30)

It is clear from scripture, that as well as bringing benefits and privileges for the believer (joy and gladness, peace, truth, enlightenment, salvation, transformation) the Kingdom also demands that responsibilities are carried out (justice, forgiveness, solidarity with the poor and victims of sin, love)

*“The Jews wanted what people have always wanted from a visible Kingdom: a chicken in every pot, full employment, a strong army to deter invaders. Jesus announced a Kingdom that meant denying yourself, taking up a cross, renouncing wealth, even loving your enemies. As He elaborated, the crowd's expectations crumbled.”*

*The Jesus I Never Knew - Philip Yancy*

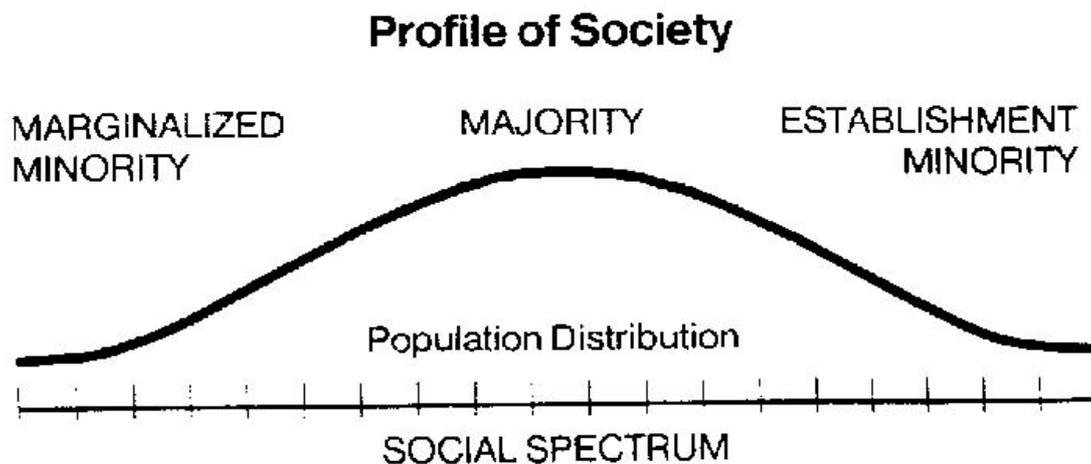
## **Church and Kingdom**

The Kingdom is not the synonym for church or Christians. It is not just the rule of God in individuals' hearts. It is not a reality limited to the church. It is not man's best effort to build an ideal society. It is God's society, God's new order of things, the putting right of how things ought to be. 'The church is the community of the Kingdom; a sign, a servant and an agent, It is called to proclaim the Kingdom and not itself'.

The church is meant to be a demonstration of the Kingdom. Individuals living out Kingdom values produce a corporate expression of what the Kingdom is all about. As Synder says 'the church gets into trouble whenever it thinks it is in the church business rather than the Kingdom business'.

It seems as though the church (and individual believers) have become confused. A secular and spiritual divide has taken place, the church has taken on a religious and ceremonial role in society rather than being a subversive agent for the Kingdom. Expressions of the Kingdom have been largely limited to the institutional church and in today's society, the physical and material implications of the Kingdom have largely been ignored.

In his book, *With Jesus in the World*, Linford Stulzman has produced a very helpful analysis of what has happened.



In the above profile of society, Stulzman states that those in the ‘majority’ have a choice as to where their allegiance lies. They can either aspire to be like the established minority endorsing its power structures, seeking to maintain the status quo and maintaining its institutions. Or, they can affiliate with the marginalised and excluded, seeking to redistribute wealth, empower the weak, and establish justice for the oppressed.

He goes on to conclude that Jesus positioned Himself to help the marginalised, whilst the church (at least post- Constantine) has largely sought to side with the establishment. If this is the case then there needs to be a fresh challenge to rediscover true Kingdom values and not institutionalised church ones, address the issues of what the church and the gospel are really all about and re-examing the messages we are communicating to the world.

#### **Shalom and Kingdom**

Colin Marchant informs us that the word Shalom occurs 250 times in the Old Testament and 90 times in the New Testament (in its Greek translation). He goes on to say that ‘Shalom is a contemporary word. It speaks today of our lifestyle, our relationships and our attitudes’.

Shalom is usually translated as 'peace'. but it is much more than that. It is about completeness, wholeness, well being, healing. It is about Jesus. The prophet Isaiah proclaimed that a child would be born and He would be 'The Prince of Peace' (shalom) Is 9:6. It is this shalom peace which is the trademark of the Kingdom It was and is manifested through Jesus and it is the hope of all. It is especially the hope for those who are excluded and marginalised.

It has been said that the rich and successful have no need of God because they can find fulfilment in life from their wealth and achievements. Whether this is true or not is open to debate. The excluded are often trapped and cannot find any solace from their isolation. It is here that the manifesto of the Prince of Shalom finds fulfillment. It is good news for the poor!

*The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me  
Because He has anointed Me to preach the gospel to the poor  
He has sent Me to proclaim release to the captives  
And recovery of sight to the blind  
To set free those who are downtrodden  
To proclaim the favourable year of the Lord*

*Luke 4:18-19 NASB*

## Personal and Group Work Questions

- **Has the church embraced too many aspects of today's culture at the expense of biblical values?**
- **Why is the gospel seen as either irrelevant or unbelievable by many young people?**
- **Is it the gospel they are rejecting, or the cultural package presented by the church?  
In a culture which is hostile and unfriendly how might the good news and the gospel take root?**
- **Reflect on the following statement:  
'In a mission culture the emphasis is on developing relationships, faith sharing and a focus in the world. In a church culture, the emphasis is on programmes.'**

# How did Jesus treat those people who had been excluded?

The story of the lost sheep (Luke 15:4-7) seems to cut against common sense in so many ways. Leaving ninety-nine in order to save one. Putting at risk the entire flock for the sake of one wayward individual is not the kind of advice generally given. Yet this is the heart of the gospel. That God so cares about each and every individual that He is prepared to extravagantly risk all for the sake of that one.

The following principles are taken from the life of Jesus. If He is our model then we must seek to work in ways which He did.

## **We must be prepared to break convention**

We could perhaps dismiss the story of the lost sheep if it were an isolated incident but clearly the Gospel accounts highlight how Jesus put into operation this parable. The story in John 4 about the Samaritan woman at the well shows Jesus in dialogue with an excluded individual.

Weary from a long journey, Jesus sat down in the heat of the midday sun and a Samaritan woman came to the well where Jesus was sitting. Jesus asked her for a drink. This small request doesn't particularly seem significant today but then Jews and Samaritans were sworn, long standing enemies. Not only that, Jesus was a Rabbi and he was forbidden to speak to a woman. To do so would seriously damage His reputation.

Jesus was prepared to break convention because he wanted to reach out with humanity and sympathy to break down the barriers in an attempt to win this woman. No doubt her reputation in the local town was not a good one. Her somewhat notorious character would almost certainly have caused her to be excluded from the rest of society. Perhaps this is why she walked to drink from this rather remote well in the midday sun.

The rest of the story can be read, but the outcome is of particular interest. Not only did the woman receive a revelation of Saviour of the world, but in the process managed to draw the rest of the town to the same revelation. All because Jesus chose to break convention.

## **We shouldn't be too concerned about our reputation**

We have already seen in the story of the woman above how Jesus laid His reputation on the line. The Gospels show us that this was not an isolated incident.

In meeting Zaccheus (Luke 19), Jesus once again risked all for the individual. Zaccheus was at the other end of the social spectrum. He was excluded because he was rich. A chief tax collector, he would have been hated by everyone. His profession had left him isolated, despised and lonely. His personal stature was small and he was probably the subject of numerous jokes which in turn, added to his low self worth. The one thing which counted for him above all else on this day was that he wanted to see Jesus.

As soon as Jesus saw him, He invited Himself for tea. The crowd immediately began to question Jesus' actions. The crowd which had turned up to see Jesus were now turning against Him. How could anyone risk their reputation and go and eat with such a man. Jesus

did. His actions and acceptance won Zaccheus over and he immediately offered to put right all that he had done wrong and more.

Jesus proclaimed salvation over the house of Zaccheus. Jesus risked His reputation in order to save that which was lost.

### **We must minister cross culturally**

The story of the Samaritan woman showed Jesus working across cultural barriers. He reinforced this principle by telling the story of the good Samaritan (Luke 10).

No doubt the crowd expected the Samaritan character in the story to be the villain, but he turned out to be the hero. Even in multi-cultural Britain so many of us still live in prejudice and ignorance of other faiths and cultures. Human thinking seems to have scarcely changed since the days of Jesus. All too easily we exclude those who look and behave differently to us.

The story of the woman in John 4 and this parable here clearly demonstrated that race was not a barrier to Jesus. In fact, His opponents actually accused Him of being a Samaritan in John 8:48 - a major insult to a Jew.

### **We should be prepared to make the first move towards others**

The parable of the great banquet (Luke 14:) is another reminder of how to treat the excluded. We have tried very hard in the UK church to reach middle England with the gospel, but it could be said that they have made many excuses as to why they are not interested. Perhaps it is time to go and invite the poor and excluded. Perhaps it would be better to not only invite them, but to actually go and be with them and then bring them to the banquet.

It is very English to be polite and wait to be asked. Jesus took the initiative. He asked the woman at the well for a drink, He asked to stay with Zaccheus, He asked the disciples to follow him and in this story it seems pretty clear that He will go to the excluded and invite them. Perhaps we can begin to see a pattern.

### **We should put peoples' problems into perspective**

Loving the sinner but not the sin has always been a challenge. Jesus successfully managed to do this without compromise. Perhaps it was because He always got things into perspective. The sin is never more important than the sinner.

The woman caught in adultery (John 8) was brought to Jesus to be condemned. Ashamed, fearful and at that moment definitely about to be excluded (probably permanently), she awaited her judgment. Jesus immediately put her situation into perspective by inviting anyone who was sin free to begin the stoning. No one did.

He did not condone her actions and He instructed her to sin no more, but most of all He allowed her another chance and that is what so many excluded young people need.

### **We should have a Kingdom perspective**

Even in His most difficult hour, Jesus still made time for the excluded. In torment, pain and anguish He had a conversation with an offender who was being executed with Him. (Luke 23: 39-43) He responded to the criminal's faith and offered him all the hope that anyone could wish for. He may not have enjoyed a fulfilled life on earth, but Jesus offered an eternity in Paradise! Hope for those who have lost hope.

### **It's often necessary to take risks**

Lepers had to cry 'Unclean!, Unclean' as they went about their business. They were banished from society and exiled from home. Not only were they afflicted with great physical problems but the psychological consequences of this exclusion were immense. In the story about a leper from Luke 5:12 Jesus touched an untouchable. He reached out His hand and declared healing with miraculous consequences. The call on the christian remains: touch the untouchable, love the unlovable, forgive the unforgivable.

### **We need to get alongside others**

Picking an individual out from amongst the crowd gives that individual recognition and esteem. This was especially true of the man waiting at the Bethesda Pool. Unable to move into the pool because of his disability and with no one to help him, the man was desperate. Jesus didn't give him a sermon on the futility of the superstition surrounding the alleged healing powers of the pool. Instead, He got alongside the man and offered him healing.

The fact that Jesus did this on the Sabbath was an added risk. Maybe He did this on purpose.

### **We have to see people as more important than social and traditional precedent**

The Gospel of Mark chapter 3, begins with a wonderful piece of human theatre. Jesus was being watched by everyone as He approached a disabled man with a withered hand. It was the Sabbath. Rabbinic tradition (note, not the Old Testament) forbade the practice of medicine on the Sabbath unless the person was on the verge of death. Everyone could feel the tension in the air and waited with anticipation.

Jesus went against the tradition, drew attention to what He was doing and why, then healed the man. All too often we get wrapped up in man-made rules and archaic traditions which prevent the Kingdom being advanced. The sad reality is that many excluded people couldn't care less about such rules and traditions. They simply want to be restored just like the man in this story.

### **Sometimes we simply have to go out of our way**

Jairus - a synagogue official - came and fell prostrate at the feet of Jesus, begging him to come and help his daughter (Mark 5:21) Jesus stopped what he was doing and set off for the family home. He went out of His way to help. On the way, something else extraordinary happened.

### **We should always act out of love and compassion**

As Jesus was making His way to the home of Jairus, a woman who had been hemorrhaging for twelve years touched the edge of Jesus' cloak. Her bleeding would have left her excluded under Jewish Law (Lev 15:25-27) and it no doubt took great courage to reach out to Jesus. She was probably hoping that she would be healed by a transfer of power without Him knowing, but she was caught in the act and fell to the ground in fear and trembling.

Jesus could have rebuked her, marginalised her, made her feel small and unworthy, but instead, He commended her faith and sent her on her way, healed and restored. Having done this, Jesus continued on His way to Jairus' house and there He raised the dead! In the crowd, Jesus saw pain, depression and lost people. It was compassion that filled and motivated Him and a call to action for the workers was announced (Matt 9:38).

### **We have to be prepared to work on the margins**

A well to do dinner shared between two respected teachers of the day (Luke 7:36) would have attracted a big crowd. People were free to go and watch such an event and learn from the pearls of wisdom which the Rabbi and the Pharisee would share as they ate. Amongst the crowd was a women of doubtful reputation.

Some would say she was a prostitute and at that, a prostitute who had fallen from the grace of society to such an extent that she wore her hair down. This was a sign of fallen and sinful behaviour in the culture of the day. She had become so used to being excluded that she appeared unconcerned about what anyone thought of her. That was except for what Jesus thought of her.

She brought perfume and anointed Jesus' feet, wiping them with her hair and weeping. She clearly had revelation about who Jesus was, revelation Simon the Pharisee had missed.

This is perhaps one of the most fantastic images in the Gospel and reveals one of the most fundamental teachings. "He who is forgiven much, loves much".

### **Be with the right people at the right time**

Nearly all the Gospel stories reveal a Jesus with a superb sense of timing and an uncanny ability to be in the right place at the right time. It would be nice to think that this was down to good personal time keeping, management and discipline and no doubt these aspect were in the mix. My own personal suspicion is that He was so in tune with the Father that He just got it right all the time.

His encounter with Legion (Luke 8:26) highlights a conversation with perhaps one of the most excluded individuals in the New Testament. Bound with chains, naked, demonised and homeless, this man found freedom when he met Jesus. My guess is that most of the people would have run a mile and left him well alone, but Jesus was in the right place, at the right time and He did the right thing.

It needn't always be as dramatic as casting out a demon. An act of kindness or a word of encouragement can make all the difference.

### **Never be afraid to reveal the truth of how things really are**

"I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners". This statement by Jesus in Mark 2:17 could summarise His mission. Somehow, the idea has been created that in order to be a christian, you must be a good person. The many stories quoted above, illustrate that this is clearly not the case when we look at the ministry of Jesus.

Jesus challenged marginalised people (often in private) as much as He challenged any other sector of the society of His day (with the possible exception of the religious!) and we must

also have the courage coupled with the sensitivity to do likewise. We have no need to skirt around issues but we must have the same grace that Jesus displayed to go alongside the truth. Our churches need to be places of “sanctuary not a lion’s den”.

These pointers are just the beginnings of a strategy to work as Jesus worked. There are doubtless other principles which further study may reveal. Above all, Jesus always worked out of a love motivation and showed respect to hurting and marginalised individuals. Paramount to His mission was the seeking of the lost of which there were and still are, many. Whilst He came to fulfill the Law the individual took precedence over protocol. The challenge is for us to go and do the same.

## Personal and Group Work Questions

- **Discuss the assertion from Linford Stutzman that ‘Unless the church is socially in the world as Jesus was, it will be difficult, if not impossible, to communicate and demonstrate the good news of the Kingdom as Jesus did.’**
- **What would be the cultural equivalent to Jesus’ eating and drinking with dubious people for your church and/or youth work and mission?**
- **Examine other stories and parables in the Gospels and see if other principles and models for ministry can be drawn out.**
- **What changes and adjustments (if any?) do you need to make in your life in order to live and work as Jesus lived and worked?**

# What can we, as the Church, do to help?

There are many practical ways which a church or group of christians (or for that matter any group of people) can actively be involved with young people and those working with young people, in their community.

The following is simply a list of activities, projects and ideas which will help build relationships with young people in your area. Each individual idea on its own, will not enable young people to maximise their lives and prevent every individual young person from being excluded, but every little helps. Who knows what will come from a word of encouragement, a genuine interest in an individual or a brief conversation?

*“Jesus went to meet the excluded of His society in the places where they lived. In His approach to them He put the person at the centre, sat down to eat with them, talked to them, touched them and addressed their needs, not ‘the problem’”*

*Judith Jenner YMCA, ‘Images’ Journal April 1999*

- **Pray for schools**
  - for the staff**
  - for the pupils**
- **Take mentoring roles with young people**
- **Support parents of challenging pupils**
- **Provide parent training classes**
- **Be school governors**
- **Get involved in Connexions**
- **Provide encouragement and finance for youth and schools workers**
- **Get involved in local sports teams and events**
- **Establish after school clubs in partnership with a school**
- **Offer the skills of people in your church to teach young people vocational, creative and practical skills**
- **Take account of the views of young people**
- **Establish ‘community focused’ churches not ‘christian ghettos’**
- **Work in partnership with other interested in young people**

- **Redefine what church is all about. Consider that one of its callings is to be the solution to social problems**
- **Host a meal for all local teachers; bless, value and encourage them**
- **Encourage creative inclusive environments for young people**
- **Open your home to young people**
- **Ensure church culture is young people friendly**
- **Buy resources for schools**
- **Have a long term committed approach to everything you do**

### Personal and Group Work Questions

- **There is a school of thought, that in order to be successful youth work has to be 'large'. To what extent do you agree with this? What 'small' things could best serve young people where you live?**
- **Take a look at the budget and/or annual accounts of your church or organisation. How much of the overall budget is spent on young people? Does this figure equate pro rata with the number of young people in your village, town or city?**

# Reality Bites - Case Studies

The following case studies are true accounts of situations involving young people. The real names of the people involved have been changed.

As you read them, think through some of the issues highlighted in this booklet and ask the questions 'What would Jesus have done?' and 'What would I have done?' The sad truth is that these stories could be told by many who work with those on the edges of our society.

## **Rubbish!**

It clashed with an important rugby match on the TV, but I agreed to help all the same. A friend asked if I would assist with the loading of a removal van for a mate of his. Having consented to help, my friend went on to say the family who we were helping move, were in a spot of bother and a little challenging!

I arrived as the work was already underway. We were starting in the garden and moving what appeared to be rubbish - half bricks, lumps of concrete, rotten timbers, muddy old boots, rusty iron bars and a broken dustbin. I looked around for the rubbish skip but couldn't find one. I asked where to put all the stuff and was told to put it in the borrowed removal van. This wasn't rubbish, but personal cherished possessions - worthless in the eyes of my middle class values, but precious in the hands of Ken, his partner, baby and two teenage sons.

The loading continued from outside the house and then we moved indoors. I'm not too sure if it was the smell or seeing the situation which stunned me first. There were 10 or so birds living in the front room, a dog somewhere around and what looked like a hamster, rabbit, ferret or rat nest which had become a toilet! Mixed in amongst these were the baby's toys.

Nothing was in boxes, nothing was packed and most of what needed packing was broken, old and dirty. Complete chaos engulfed the misery of the house.

The van was loaded armful by armful and I kept my gloves on. Each time I entered the house I took a deep breath tried to grab something and return to the fresh air outside without breathing again. The process went on for several hours. The two teenage sons were somewhat strangely not offering to move anything or help in any way. It transpired that they were out of it as they had been smoking pot upstairs in one of the empty bedrooms.

I accepted in theory that this type of poverty existed in my own town, but the reality of being there first hand was a humbling experience. Those of us who helped load the van did so largely in complete silence. Bemused by the situation and with nothing constructive to say, we simply ferried back and too.

## **A Day Off School**

Gary was 15 and a nice sort of lad. He'd never been in trouble either at school, home or with the police. He was however, anxious to be accepted by his friends and didn't want to be left out.

One school lunch time, one of his mates informed Gary that he was bunking off school in the afternoon because he was bored and hated maths. He invited Gary to come with him and they would go and have some fun in and around the local shops. Because of Gary's desire to be part of the in crowd, he agreed to go with his friend. They left school at lunch time.

Mid way through the afternoon, Gary's mate suggested that for a laugh they go and rob the local Post Office. Gary now felt very apprehensive and isolated but, somewhat out of character, he went along with the suggestion.

Together they walked into the Post Office, where to Gary's horror, his mate pulled out a very large knife and threatened the staff. They got £500 and ran for it.

Within minutes they had both been arrested by the police. They were charged and found guilty of armed robbery. Gary is sent to a Young Offenders Institute. He cannot believe what he has done and what has subsequently happened to him. He is devastated, depressed and unable to come to terms with prison life. He is looking for a way out.

### **The world where I belong**

Carol arrives with her 'family': two younger brothers and a baby. She's dressed in skimpy top and white latex leggings, fine for summer, but this is winter. Mum is not around and step dad is in the pub. Her real dad moved away several years ago. Carol is 13 and has been walking up and down the streets for several hours as there is nothing for her to do. She is in charge of the children.

It's cold and raining outside and all Carol wants is some shelter for a few hours. The baby is in urgent need of a nappy change, but Carol doesn't have any nappies with her. Baby is continually crying.

As the initial conversation has begun to dry up, we decide to do some drawing and painting which goes down a real storm and holds their attention for a couple of hours. After this it is time for Carol to start patrolling the streets as she makes her way home. She declines a lift in the car perhaps because this will mean that she will get home sooner. She ventures out into the rain to walk the couple of miles home.

Carol visits us every week or so for a few months and then disappears. She goes to stay with her dad for a while, before eventually running away from him. After a while, she is found by the police and is returned to her mum. She has stopped going to school because it is boring. She prefers the company of her 20 Benson and Hedges and her new boyfriend.

### **I'm so F#\*king Alone...**

I sat on the corner of Wilson and Broadway yakking to sex workers and the likes for 5hrs in the heat. Yet the story which needs to be told comes from with a 22yr old homeless man going on 50yrs. He was dirty and stunk of last weeks sleep: unemployed, alcohol-dependent, and a case study for a local social worker. We yarned off and on over the 5hrs, shared stories of our lives - his wish to travel, though he had never left the corner...EVER.. Wilson is a ghetto a real ghetto. He sipped beer from a quart, urinated through his pants for the third time since I had been there, as I tried to squeeze into the shade. This man's main objective for the day was to earn enough change for another quart of beer. Sadly there's no change on Wilson St. As

time approached for me to leave I decided to ask this young man what his most pressing need or issue was.... You would expect housing, clothing, food, pre-employment courses, and any array of social services.... Yet out of his heart came a piercing confession:

'I'm lonely....' He told me of his overwhelming lostness and loneliness. When he eats (infrequently), he eats alone; when he sleeps, wakes, it's always alone.... No one shares his beer, and he tells me I am the only person to have ever sat and talked....

I felt incredibly shallow having to leave. Again the issue of belonging is the predominant theme amongst the poor and dispossessed, and yet some, if not most, agencies never address this.

### **It's not my job.**

Harry visited the church two or three times a week. Poorly, clothed, smelly, hungry and dejected he would patiently wait for someone to open the church door and make him a cup of tea. We were at the church for a couple of days a week and we accommodated him when we could but sometimes felt as though he were an inconvenience we could have done without..

Harry never caused anyone any problems. He just wanted to sit and drink his tea. Have a moment of disjointed conversation, warm his bones for a while and then he would leave and return to the cold.

One day Harry turned up when we weren't there. The church administrator answered the door and greeted Harry.

Harry didn't get a cup of tea that day. The administrator wouldn't let him in. The next day the administrator complained to us that Harry was interrupting his work and stated that it "wasn't his job" to entertain the local down and out. "Could we ensure that it didn't happen again."

The trouble is, it isn't really anyone's job to make Harry a cup of tea. It's not about jobs. It's about looking after and showing love to those who are not loved. Is that too much to ask?

### **Another day at the office?**

I went into the cell of a lad we shall call Jimmy. I spent about twenty minutes or so with him and he asked me a number of things. Firstly, he wanted a book - I said I would try and get him one. He wanted a smoke - I asked an officer if he could get one from another inmate, but this was not possible. He said he was unwell and wanted to go to the hospital block so we talked about his medical condition. He wanted a radio - I had none to give. He wanted probation. I said that I would let the authorities know. He did not seem too bad, just full of demands like so many.

We reviewed all the self-harmers on the wing, seeing them one by one in the office. Jimmy seemed fairly okay. He was angry that they had decided not to send him to the hospital, because he had been discharged that very morning, and his situation had not changed.

After that I went to see another lad. We shall call him Simon. Simon had been coming to the Christian group every week for six months. His attitude was excellent: polite, friendly, a very helpful lad to have in the group. It just so happened that he had been to chapel that Sunday to

an evangelistic service. He said that he wanted to become a Christian, and we prayed about this. He made a faith commitment! I then went to see another potential self-harmer, before going home.

Two hours later, as I was about to have dinner, the phone rang. It was the prison - 'a serious incident at the prison of grave proportions.' Jimmy had tried to hang himself. I said I would come in. The fear and stress factor was high. I rang another chaplain and went to the prison.

When I arrived I was told that Jimmy was on a life support machine in a local hospital. The prison staff had managed to revive him - when I saw them, they were obviously shocked, but coping. I then saw the inmates who had seen Jimmy hanging. They were also in shock and I tried to console them.

Then off to hospital, relieved that Jimmy was still alive. I got there before his family. He was in a critical condition - not a lot of hope, but the hospital were doing their best. The family arrived. His mother asked me to stay and the long wait began. I sat amongst the family from eight till midnight. About ten family members slept on the carpet in the hospital.

I went back the next morning. Jimmy was still on the machine, still breathing, not much more. The family waited for tests and I waited with them to support them and keep the prison informed. By four o'clock I was totally exhausted. I came home, and phoned another chaplain to carry on the vigil. He did for the next two days until Jimmy died.

To try and put down all the details of the situation and the extent that people were affected would take much longer than this piece. All who were involved questioned their own actions and the feelings, emotions and situations that followed this went on for weeks. There was the funeral and the inquiry.

How should I cope with all this? What should I say about the dreadful day this happened? What good can come from this? Then I remembered that Simon had come to faith.

Three months after this all took place I went to buy a paper in the local Newsagent's. An old photo of Simon was on the front page. "Grieving Mother loses son to drugs." Simon had got out of prison and within one week had taken a drug overdose. I went to see his mother, I wanted to pay my respects. Two weeks later, Simon's brother died following another drug overdose.

# Further Reading and Reflection

## Books

TITLE	AUTHOR	PUBLISHER	ISBN No
Threshold of the Future The End of Christendom and The Future of Christianity Faith in a Changing Culture	Michael Riddell	SPCK	O 282 05055 4
The Once and Future Church Messiah People How Faith Grows	Douglas Hall John Drane Loren Mead Jim Punton	Gracewing/Trinity Marshall Pickering Alban Institute N.Y. Hot Iron Press National Society	0 56338 421 4 0 551 03074 4 1 56699 050 5 0 851942 2 5 0 7157 4809 5
Liberating the Church The Upside Down Kingdom With Jesus in the World Mustard Seed v MacWorld Accompanying	Howard Snyder Donald Kraybill Linford Stutzman Tom Sine Maxine Green and Chandu Christian	Marshalls Herald Herald Monarch National Society	0 551 01041 X 0 88361 1860 X 0 8361 3599 7 1 85424 435 3 0 7151 4908 3
Bring Forth Justice Community of the King Dangerous Wonder Agenda for Biblical People Discipling the City Believing in the Future The Mission of Theology and Theology as Mission The Bible and Postmodern Imagination The Jesus I Never Knew Shalom My Friends Excluded, but not Rejected	Waldren Scott Howard Snyder Mike Yaconelli Jim Wallis Ed Roger Greenway David S Bosch J Andrew Kirk Walter Brueggemann Philip Yancy Colin Marchant John Hallett	Eerdmans IVP Now Press Triangle Baker Gracewing/Trinity Gracewing/Trinity SCM Marshall Pickering Marshall Pickering CARE/EA	0 8926 1848 X 0 87784 725 5 1 57683 128 0 0281 04248 9 0 8010 3949 9 1 56338 117 6 01 56338 189 3 0 334 00103 X 0 551 02960 9 0 551 01615 9 www.eauk.org

## Web Sites

Social Exclusion: [www.cabinet-office.gov.uk/seu/index.htm](http://www.cabinet-office.gov.uk/seu/index.htm)

Connexions: [www.connexions.gov.uk](http://www.connexions.gov.uk)

Sojourners: [www.sojo.net](http://www.sojo.net)

Bullying: [www.Pupiline.net](http://www.Pupiline.net)

Joseph Rowntree Foundation: [www.jrf.org.uk](http://www.jrf.org.uk)

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