

## Letters to Young People - 'Exclusion'

by [Gary Young](#) on Thursday, August 26, 2010 at 10:03am

Most of us, from time to time, have felt excluded. Of course, sometimes we prefer our own company, and there are some people who are more comfortable on their own at least some of the time. But to be completely excluded, whether it be from a friendship group, an activity, an outing or whatever, is never an enjoyable thing. It makes us feel hurt, it can cause us to question whether we are a good person, it makes us ask why would our friends and associates want us to not be a part of their group or activity.

Usually those who are doing the excluding are quite flippant about it – they say things like “oh she doesn’t like these sorts of things”, or “he’ll just hang around and not join in, so why would he bother”, or any one of hundreds of possible justifications. If they give pause to think at all of the effect their actions and attitudes are having, then it is all too brief. These attitudes cause hurt, and can go further than that – we need to be there for each other, not exclude each other.

Sometimes these sorts of actions can go further, and can include the deliberate exclusion of an individual or group; bullying and ridicule often feature in this kind of behavior. We’re probably all familiar with cases such as this, and also we may be aware of the terrible consequences that can arise from them. Usually the person or people being excluded are ‘different’ in some way. They might be a different race, they might speak with a different accent, they might not be good at sports, they might look different, they might like to read books – there are any number of possibilities.

If this is happening to you, there’s one thing you need to know straight away. You didn’t earn this. You don’t deserve it, and they have no right to do this to you. Those who behave in this way are actually revealing their own insecurity: they are trying to reinforce their own sense of self worth by picking on those they see as less powerful. They value their ‘popularity’ above all and think they can maintain it by excluding and ridiculing those they see as different. If you are the victim of this behaviour, you can get help, from teachers, friends, counsellors, preachers and others. If you see it, don’t just stand by and do nothing – you can make a difference, and one of the most effective ways you can do that is by refusing to participate in the exclusion. Rise above it, and be the kind of person who makes things better, not worse; who helps people, not hurts them.

Jesus was a person who refused to participate in ‘exclusions’. He once spoke to a woman of Samaria, and His followers were shocked that He was speaking to her (John 4: 27). In fact, even she was shocked that He spoke to her (John 4: 9). The Samaritans were the enemies of the Jews, and as a woman the religious authorities of the day regarded her as beneath the notice of a religious teacher. In addition, she was living in an immoral relationship, which

although Jesus didn't approve of it (He wanted her to change her life), He didn't use that as a reason to shun her. On three grounds, then, the religious authorities of Jesus' day would have excluded and shunned this woman. But Jesus was different. He cared about her, and He refused to exclude or to shun anyone. He reached out to those who needed help, to the downtrodden, to the lost, to everyone.

We need to be like that. Do you know someone who is excluded? Do you see shunning, ridicule and bullying going on around you? Do like Jesus did, and reach out to those people. Not out of pity or charity, but out of a recognition that those people are just as worthwhile, just as important, just as needful of love and friendship and compassion as you are. You wouldn't like it to happen to you, and if it was happening to you, you wouldn't like your friends to stand by and do nothing. As Ghandi said, "Be the change you want to see in the world". Be like Jesus, and reach out to everyone, because we all need someone to reach out to us. That 'someone' can be you.