

## Towards Maturity: the Journey from Exclusion to Inclusion

*"When our hearts are filled with prejudices, worries, and fears, there is little room for a stranger."*

*"In my earlier life, community meant a safe and familiar place of belonging where those not like me simply were not present. I came from a Dutch Catholic family where it was clear who **we** were and who **they** were. **They** were all non-Catholics. **They** were nonbelievers. **They** got divorced or were gay. While **we** were okay because **we** believed the right teachings and lived a moral life."*

*"At Yale and Harvard...I learned from my students that God was greater than my Roman Catholic conceptions...it is a frightening thing when boundaries are pushed out and walls break down. How could the nonbeliever be more believing than the believer, the outsider wiser than the insider? How could those without resources have something valuable to share?"*

Henri Nouwen<sup>1</sup>

### Dropping Keys

A Poem by Hafez<sup>2,3</sup>

*The small person  
Builds cages for everyone  
He  
Sees.  
Instead, the sage,  
Who needs to duck his head,  
When the moon is low,  
Can be found dropping keys, all night long  
For the beautiful,  
Rowdy,  
Prisoners.*

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<sup>1</sup> *Spiritual Formation, Following the Movements of the Spirit*; Henri Nouwen with Michael J. Christensen & Rebecca J Laird; pp. 91-93.

<sup>2</sup> Despite his profound effect on Persian life and culture and his enduring popularity and influence, few details of Hafez's life [1317—1390, also known as *Hafiz*] are known. There is a great deal of mythical anecdote. His collected works are to be found in the homes of most Iranians, who learn his poems by heart and use them as proverbs and sayings to this day. Hāfez left his mark on Western writers such as Ralph Waldo Emerson and Goethe. Most recently, *The Gift: Poems by Hafiz the Great Sufi Master* has been translated by Daniel Ladinsky (1999). Some believe that Ladinsky has composed more than he has translated. There is no definitive version of Hafiz's collected works; editions vary from 573 to 994 poems.

<sup>3</sup> Sufism is the mystical dimension of Islam. Classical Sufi scholars define its objective as restoration of the heart and turning it away from all else but God

Here is the question for mentoring this month—does growing to maturity in Christ, hopefully reflecting more of God’s character in our lives, mean that we become more elite, pious, and exclusive, or more expansive, hospitable, generous and inclusive? Let’s first explore this issue with some definitions and a summary of the “theological debate”.

Definitions:

1. **Inclusion:** A belief and resultant behaviour that God is present in the whole world and God’s grace is also at work in some way among all people. The unevangelized may be saved if they respond in faith to God based on the revelation they have.
2. **Exclusivism:** a belief and resultant behaviour that Jesus is the only Saviour for all humanity and that it is not possible to attain salvation apart from explicit knowledge of Him.

#### The Argument for Inclusion<sup>4</sup>

1. God's love extends to all humanity (1 Tim 2:4; Rom 11:32; 2 Pet 3:9) thereby providing hope for a substantial redemption of humanity based upon the boundless mercy of God. This stands in contrast to the traditional view that some are saved, but far from all.
2. Salvation for the world is reached by way of particularity in Jesus. God saves the many through the One. Grace is universal because it is particular. People may be saved by Christ without actually knowing the name of Jesus.
3. The Holy Spirit is working in all people and in all ages and locations. The Holy Spirit saves even where Christ is unknown. Believers are called to recognize and cooperate with work God is all ready doing when they proclaim Jesus as Saviour and Lord.
4. God accepts those who fear him, even where Christ is yet to be proclaimed. Those who have lived their life only under the influence of God's general revelation are nonetheless able to receive the benefits provided for by the redemption of Christ. God takes account of faith in him and always sees to it that those responding to the light they have encounter Jesus Christ, whether before or after death.
5. Evangelicals have narrowed the motivation for missions down to the deliverance from wrath, making it the major reason for missions when it is not. It is a travesty to maintain that the primary motive of missions is to rescue souls from hell. The purpose of the Christian missions is far broader, and its motivation far more reaching. The deepest motive of all for Christian missions is eschatological--to see the kingdom come and God's rule established.

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<sup>4</sup> See Clark Pinnock; *A Wideness in God's Mercy: The Finality of Jesus Christ in a World of Religions*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Academic and Professional Books, Zondervan Pub. House, 1992

6. God is at work redemptively in the lives of all people. God is free to work salvifically in various cultural, temporal, geographical and religious contexts. That is, the particularity of salvation in Jesus is not to be equated with a restrictiveness of salvation. The gospel is about God's grace not about cognitive information about Jesus.

### The Argument for Exclusivism<sup>5</sup>

1. The following scriptures taken at face value are to be considered normative for salvation—
  - a. John 14: 6—*Jesus answered, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me."*
  - b. Acts 4:12—*"Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved."*
  - c. 1 John 5:11-13—*And this is the testimony: God has given us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life. I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God so that you may know that you have eternal life.*
2. Exclusivism holds that at best we do not know for sure what God might do about the unevangelized. But unless they hear the Gospel and receive Jesus Christ as their Savior they have no hope. Exclusivists do not do teach this with any joy but only because they believe this is made abundantly clear in Scripture. This is humbling for apart from the grace of God they would be part of the unevangelized. Also it causes them to prayerfully ask the Lord what can be done to make sure there are no unevangelized on my watch.
3. Historically, Exclusivism has been the motivating factor for missions. Since the unevangelized have no hope without hearing the Gospel, then it is imperative that to obey the command of our Lord to make disciples. There is urgency because no one can believe until they hear.

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<sup>5</sup> See *The Salvation of the Unevangelized: What the Literature Suggests* by Robert A. Alstadt and Enoch Wan [a paper from the Doctor of Missiology Program at Western Seminary, Portland Oregon] published in *Global Missiology, Contemporary Practices*, January 2005.

Next let's consider one of Jesus' Kingdom parables<sup>6</sup> recorded in **Luke 14**. Here is the text from The Message with the context:

*<sup>1-3</sup> One time when Jesus went for a Sabbath meal with one of the top leaders of the Pharisees, all the guests had their eyes on him, watching his every move. Right before him there was a man hugely swollen in his joints. So Jesus asked the religion scholars and Pharisees present, "Is it permitted to heal on the Sabbath? Yes or no?"*

*<sup>12-14</sup> Then he turned to the host. "The next time you put on a dinner, don't just invite your friends and family and rich neighbours, the kind of people who will return the favour. Invite some people who never get invited out, the misfits from the wrong side of the tracks. You'll be—and experience—a blessing. They won't be able to return the favour, but the favour will be returned—oh, how it will be returned!—at the resurrection of God's people."*

### **The Story of the Dinner Party**

*<sup>15</sup> That triggered a response from one of the guests: "How fortunate the one who gets to eat dinner in God's kingdom!"*

*<sup>16-17</sup> Jesus followed up. "Yes. For there was once a man who threw a great dinner party and invited many. When it was time for dinner, he sent out his servant to the invited guests, saying, 'Come on in; the food's on the table.'*

*<sup>18</sup> Then they all began to beg off, one after another making excuses. The first said, 'I bought a piece of property and need to look it over. Send my regrets.'*

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<sup>6</sup> Throughout church history the parables have suffered from more misinterpretation than almost any other literary genre in the Bible except the Book of Revelation. The misinterpretation of the parables stems from the idea that the parables hold hidden meanings, mysteries of God, and spiritual truths which can only be uncovered by finding the meaning of every detail of the parable.

Parables generally have one main point. Do not look for meaning in the details but in the main point. The main point of the parable is in the intended response. The intended response, the "punch-line" of parable, often contains a surprise or twist the hearer did not expect.

The Kingdom parables usually start with a phrase like, "The Kingdom of God is like . . ." In these parables the whole parable, not the details, tells us something about the Kingdom of God. In other words the Kingdom of God is not like a mustard seed, merchant, or hidden treasure, but like the main point of the parable. It would be better to start reading these parables, "It is like this with the Kingdom of God . . ."

Kingdom parables usually proclaim the already/not-yet nature of the Kingdom of God. This already/not tension is normally expressed in two themes: 1) immanent judgment and 2) salvation freely offered to all. Urgency--calling for action--characterizes kingdom parables.

Parables were told to be understood. Read for the natural sense. Note the occasion of the parable. Get inside the skin of the main characters and their appropriate or inappropriate actions. Imagine how the original readers would have been pricked by the story. And most of all pay attention to the intended response or main point. For more on this see Gordon Fee and Douglas Stuart in How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth, (Zondervan, pp. 123-125).

<sup>19</sup>"Another said, 'I just bought five teams of oxen, and I really need to check them out. Send my regrets.'

<sup>20</sup>"And yet another said, 'I just got married and need to get home to my wife.'

<sup>21</sup>"The servant came back and reported this to his master. Then the owner of the house became angry and ordered his servant, 'Go out quickly into the streets and alleys of the town and bring in the poor, the crippled, the blind and the lame.'

<sup>22</sup>"The servant reported back, 'Master, I did what you commanded— and there's still room.'

<sup>23-24</sup>"The master said, 'Then go to the country roads. Whoever you find, drag them in. I want my house full! Let me tell you, not one of those originally invited is going to get so much as a bite at my dinner party.'"

### **Figure the Cost**

<sup>25-27</sup> One day when large groups of people were walking along with him, Jesus turned and told them, "Anyone who comes to me but refuses to let go of father, mother, spouse, children, brothers, sisters—yes, even one's own self!—can't be my disciple. Anyone who won't shoulder his own cross and follow behind me can't be my disciple.

<sup>28-30</sup> "Is there anyone here who, planning to build a new house, doesn't first sit down and figure the cost so you'll know if you can complete it? If you only get the foundation laid and then run out of money, you're going to look pretty foolish. Everyone passing by will poke fun at you: 'He started something he couldn't finish.'

### **Background notes on the parable**

1. **Setting:** Jesus was at the house of one of the leaders of the Pharisees on the Sabbath. Jesus noticed that some of the invited guests at the house were seeking the more honoured places to sit. Jesus spoke about being humble and seeking the lower position. He then spoke about inviting the poor and the crippled to dinner, even though they could not repay the host, because the host would be repaid in the resurrection
2. **Guest List and First Invitation:** It was the custom when giving a dinner, to invite a certain number of people. Those who accepted the invitation were then counted. The meal was prepared according to the number who accepted the invitation. The more people coming, the more food had to be prepared. For example, a chicken would be for 2-4 guests, a duck for 5-8, a lamb for 10-15, a sheep for 15-35, and a calf for 35-75. In other words, the amount and type of meat depends on the number of people who accept the invitation. Once an animal has been killed it must be eaten soon or else it will spoil. Therefore, to back out at the last minute would be rude. The invited guest is duty bound to attend the banquet. Also, it was considered very rude to attend a banquet if you were not invited; after all, the meal had not been prepared with you in mind.

3. **Second invitation:** is a notification to the guests that the meal is ready. The Greek word "come" means literally, continue coming. This is consistent with the custom of a double invitation. The meal has been prepared, the table set, and people notified. To back out now is an insult.
4. **Excuse #1—Buying a Field:** In the Middle East, no one buys a field without first examining it thoroughly. The springs, wells, stone walls, trees, paths, and anticipated rainfall are all well-known long before a discussion of the purchase is even begun. The excuse is a lie, an obvious one, and the guest is stating in no uncertain terms that the field is more important than his relationship with the host. In a community where interpersonal relationships are very important, this strikes even harder as an offence.
5. **Excuse #2—Buying Oxen:** Teams of oxen are sold in the Middle East in two ways. They are taken to the market place and a nearby field and there they plough the field. Anyone wishing to buy may then drive the oxen himself and examine the animals thoroughly to see if they work well as a team. The other way to buy the oxen is to announce that the team is for sale and say what day the team will be working in the field. Prospective buyers can then come to the field, watch, examine, and test them for themselves. Only after the team is examined thoroughly is a price discussed. This excuse, like the other one, is also an insult.
6. **Excuse #3—The Wedding:** In the tightly knit community of the Middle East a wedding calls for a celebration. At a celebration is food, and lots of it. The community would have been aware of the wedding and many people would have been invited. Meals would have been prepared beforehand. Therefore, the banquet would not have been scheduled for the same day as a wedding
7. **An Insulted Host:** Anger would be a natural expectation of the head of the household. He has been insulted three times.
8. **Invite Everyone Else:** The invited guests refuse to respond to the good news that the feast is ready. What then is the host to do? He cannot have a feast without guests. He then invites the unworthy, the poor, crippled, blind, and lame. He brings in the undesirables. So, he gives the command to bring in the poor, who aren't normally invited to banquets; the crippled, who cannot test oxen in the field; and the blind and lame who don't normally marry. They have no way of repaying the host. This is typical of God's grace—it is extended to those who can't repay
9. **Who's Who:** The original audience in the parable would likely have identified the **Original Guests** as the leaders of Israel who are rightfully the first to be invited; the **Lame and Poor** of the City as the outcasts within the house of Israel; and the **Guests from the Highways and the Hedges** as Gentiles.
10. **Main point of the parable--** all are invited. They have only to "count themselves in" rather than "count themselves out." God is gracious and hospitable to those on the "outside" who have no way of repaying him for His grace and hospitality.

Reflection:

1. What aspects of the character of God are reflected in the parable?
2. What do you think the main point of the parable is?
3. What impact does this have on the inclusion/exclusion discussion?
4. How do you choose to live now in relation to those who you would consider “outside”?
5. What would it be like to give up “being the judge” of who is “in” and who is “out” and trust that God knows what He is doing when it comes to people who need salvation?

## Spiritual Exercise:

### Towards Maturity: the Journey from Exclusion to Inclusion

1. Goals:

- a. To identify where you are at on the journey to maturity in Christ as it pertains to treating people as Jesus would treat them.
- b. To see the relationship of belief and behaviour in Christian maturity.
- c. To choose godly behaviours even when theological issues are undecided.
- d. To discover how you change and grow

2. Maturing means change. Maturing in Christ means becoming more like Him in attitudes and actions. Consider this selection of exhortations from Ephesians 4 -5—they are about behaviours. One could summarize this list by saying “be filled with the Spirit and imitate God”. This list assumes that you already have “the mind of Christ” [Philippians 2]

- I urge you to live a life worthy [of the gospel]
- Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit
- Speak the truth in love
- Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God
- Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you
- Be imitators of God
- Live as children of light
- Find out what pleases the Lord...
- Do not be foolish, but understand what the Lord's will is
- Be filled with the Spirit.

3. So the question for this session is—how can you change so that your life reflecting more of God's character?

- a. In your view of yourself, others, the world, and your purpose in life?
- b. In your actions toward yourself and others?

4. Pick one episode from your life where you are aware of change in your life

- a. Narrate the circumstance and include
  - i. What changed—belief [view of self? view of other? Etc] Behaviour?

- ii. What did God/Spirit do to bring about the change?
- iii. What did you do to change?

**5. Read through and discuss the following material on change. See what you can discover about yourself.**

- 6.** Change is not a simple thing, it is complex. Humans don't change either their inherited beliefs or well practiced behaviours easily. Even with the Bible's view of change, which we've summarized in the phrase "be filled with the Spirit and imitate God," the process of change may be unclear.
- a. You can change, but not by willpower. Psychological researchers have found that willpower is of limited use in change for most people. For example a day or two after a motivational lecture and the excitement fades and real life returns for most people. The alternative to will is skill. When specific skills are learned and mastered real change results—people can and do produce meaningful changes in their relationships; behaviours and moods.
  - b. Seven truths about changing from psychological research
    - i. Change occurs in stages. Because behaviours are complex breaking them down into smaller, self contained bits; taking baby steps; strategizing solutions to inevitable setbacks enhances change.
    - ii. Slow change is best. Change is most effective when it occurs slowly, allowing behaviours to become automatic.
    - iii. Change is frightening and is resisted because of unknown consequences. Fear increases the probability of failure. Being realistic about what to change and going at it slowly enhances change.
    - iv. Surprise spells disaster for people seeking change. Knowing more about the process; the needed skills, the steps, as well as specific positive feedback enhances change.
    - v. Punishment is *the* pitfall. Change will not be permanent if punishment is way you are rewarded. Enjoying the change; or admiring the results; or congratulating yourself enhances positive and permanent change.
    - vi. Spontaneity sabotages change. While spontaneity is wonderful for some activities, it's a sure-fire method for sabotaging change. *Change Requires Structure.* Creating a structure that is not restrictive or unhelpful enhances change.
    - vii. Practice is necessary for change. Practice makes new behaviours automatic and a natural part of who we are.
    - viii. **Which of the above "strike home" with you in your successful and unsuccessful desired change?**

- c. What style of change has already been a part of your life? You may not be aware of it but you already have made changes in your life. What “style of changing” worked for you then?
- i. Imitating a desired behaviour you saw in someone?
  - ii. Environment with models: being around a community of people that included people of whom you said, “I want to be like...”?
  - iii. Making a plan. Setting a goal and working toward it? Independently? With a coach?
  - iv. Learning a skill. Stage by stage practice and feedback from an instructor, counsellor, life coach?

### 7. Consider Henri Nouwen’s change experience:

- a. After nearly two decades of teaching at the Menninger Foundation Clinic in Topeka, Kansas, and at the University of Notre Dame, Yale University and Harvard University, Nouwen choose to leave the academic setting and live and work with mentally challenged people at the L'Arche community of Daybreak in Toronto, Canada.
- b. From his experience in the Larch community with disabled people:

*I came to realize that the difference between people with disabilities and those with different abilities just wasn't there anymore; that I could love those with physical and intellectual challenges because I had my own set of disabilities. I could be as close to people in pain because somehow they revealed my pain to me. No longer did I have to compare myself with other by carving out a little niche and distinguishing myself.*

*I finally understood that the great spiritual call is not to be different from the other but to be of the same substance and being as another, to be at one with others...we need not make comparisons and judgments about others: I am not like him or her or them, I am more, I am better, I am different from the others...we belong to the ...human race...`it is a glorious destination to be a member of the human race.`<sup>7</sup>*

*To come to that inner place of not judging in the face of the enormous variety of human experience and expressions is a long road of faith. To overcome that constant need to determine my comparative place, and to be simply who I am, can make me whole. To finally let go of that burden is one of the greatest joys and freedoms in life.<sup>8</sup>*

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<sup>7</sup> Quoting Thomas Merton, *Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander*, 1966.

<sup>8</sup> *Spiritual Formation, Following the Movements of the Spirit*; Henri Nouwen with Michael J. Christensen & Rebecca J Laird; pp. 92-97.

**c. What contributed to Nouwen's change?**

**8. Consider the poem—*Dropping Keys* by Hafiz found at the beginning of the chapter: *Towards Maturity: the Journey from Exclusion to Inclusion***

- a. What does the poem say about judging?
- b. What are the consequences of a lifestyle of judging?
- c. What does the poem suggest frees people to change?
- d. What is the role of the wise outsider to helping people change?

**9. Time to bring this exploration to a conclusion and continue the process of your change.**

- a. You've looked in this study some or all of
  - i. The contrast between inclusion and exclusion
  - ii. A portion of Scripture that gives one perspective on the inclusion/exclusion debate
  - iii. The Biblical view of maturity
  - iv. The process of change informed by psychology
  - v. The example of Henri Nouwen changing;
  - vi. the wisdom of Hafiz;

**b. Now enter into listening prayer**

- i. Imagine yourself in a class room with Jesus as the professor. This is a teacher student conference. Jesus is going to write on the board the most important thing he wants you to know and to do from all this discussion.
  1. What do you see appearing on the board?
  2. What do you ask Jesus from what is on the board?
  3. What does he say to you?
    - a. Pay attention to "the invitation"
    - b. Pay attention to "the next step"
- ii. When you come out of the listening prayer experience, discuss the experience in the mentoring session.

