

# *The Untouchables*

*ministry to those who Jesus ministered too*



The smell of the Chennai slum was overwhelming. Thousands of people in a few square miles, living 10-12 to a house, they subsisted on pennies a day and drank from a river that I was scared to go near and cooking on fires outside their door. Poor hygiene and sanitation was a large factor in the stench that permeated the area. Aaron Jones found a toddler to roll a ball with, as we got to see first hand the Indian Caste System's lowest

rung. Later we would travel to the Changlaputte Leper Colony and see truly what "untouchable" meant. The words "untouchable", "outcast", "outsider" are communicated in our society often, but never in scripture from Jesus.

A few weeks ago, *Relevant Magazine* posted an article describing the "5 Uncomfortable Issues the Church Needs to Start Talking About".<sup>1</sup> The Church has taken on a reputation, and some of it deservedly so, as being unwilling to converse and engage, with respect, humility, and intelligence, culture on sensitive and hot-button issues. Instead of uncomfortable issues the church will face, what about the uncomfortable people the Church will engage? For years, the church has also ignored and avoided certain people.

Many observations can be made about the Gospel of Luke, but one thing at the forefront is Luke's affinity for the outcast. In Luke 10.30-37 there are a couple themes that can be extrapolated through Jesus Parable on the Good Samaritan. The first observation is the hero of the story is a sub-human half-breed Samaritan. Jews refused to interact with or pass through their land. The second is that the "church", the religious people passed by the beaten man. The people who were supposed to care for the man, the priest and Levite, passed by. Observation 3: the Samaritan upheld mercy. Jesus chose to elevate mercy [*e/eos*] as the example for us to show others (Luke 10.37). Throughout his Gospel, Luke doesn't discriminate based on gender, social status, ethnicity, or worldview. It makes sense; Luke was the only Gentile author in the New Testament and was probably a slave himself (two strikes against him in Jewish life). In the Gospel of Luke we read more about Jesus meeting women, the disabled, traitors to the Jewish nation, Roman Centurions, beggars, people of dysfunction, and the poor. Luke has an eye for the down and out.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.relevantmagazine.com/god/church/5-uncomfortable-issues-church-needs-start-talking-about>

Understanding Jesus heart for the outsider and outcast, especially as it comes through his Gospel, is an example to the Church and a foundation of the early believers as depicted in the Book of Acts (also from Luke's pen). Are youth groups (and by proxy the Church) reaching the marginalized and caring about the exiled like Jesus did? Who are the contemporary castoffs? Here are three types modern-day sendoffs (who's numbers will rise soon) and how we can minister to them:

The Intellectual. The amount of information at our student's fingers is baffling and they are bombarded by worldviews and theories at an alarming rate. Many students are more curious than we give them credit for. They may hide it behind humor or sarcasm, but their doubts are real. There are many students who think through and struggle with faith. Jude advises us to be merciful to those who doubt (22) and the best way to do so is by seriously listening to their questions. They are searching for answers and our relationship with them causes them to ask. Truthful answers are what they seek and "I don't know, but I will find out" might be the most truthful response you have. Let their curiosity fuel yours. Search alongside them, find the answer, and celebrate with them. Be open to their questions and honest in response.

The Orphan. In the U.S. there are 400,000 kids in the foster care system with 100,000 waiting to be adopted, and these numbers are expected to rise significantly over the next few years. Many of the kids in foster care carry with them issues of poverty, abuse, and neglect. How will churches respond to an ever-growing number of parentless students? Two hours a week we have the opportunity to influence our students. The foster care system is full of constant change but we can be the constant in student's life. Consistency, awareness, and patience are key in this area of ministry.

Ministering to those struggling with homosexuality. With the rise in profile of homosexuality in mainstream culture, the number of students dealing with same-sex attraction and gender confusion is growing. The number of students walking into youth group dealing with these issues will continue to increase. Students dealing with these issues need to be shown love and grace as well as truth. They need to know that they are accepted at church and not judged by the adults in their lives. Prayer needs to cover every aspect of your involvement with them, consistency is key to helping them with these issues, and accountability will protect you and them.

In the next few years, the Church and youth group will need to up our game. God will bring students to us who desperately need Him. What will we do with the students who come our way? Jesus never wasted an opportunity and never looked past a hurting person. Luke shows us that His time was spent with those who fell outside of the circles. Jesus knew what God desired "mercy [*eleos*] not sacrifice" (Matthew 9.13; 12.7) and that mercy [*eleos*] was an "important matter" (Matthew 23.23) that can be readily displayed in the lives of these students that will cross our paths!