

Christians: The New Social Outcasts

I was an outcast in the 6th grade. I've told more than one person that I wouldn't go back to that time in my life for all the money in the world. That was the year my classmates got downright mean. We've all heard the old saying, "Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words will never hurt me," but many of us know from personal experience that they can. Words can wound our spirits and create fear and isolation. Some of the 6th graders in my class knew this all too well and used it to their advantage.

One day after school, I boarded my bus and was waiting for it to take me home. There were around 20 other busloads of students waiting to do the same thing. One of my classmates leaned out his window so hundreds of kids could see and hear him. He started speaking in a mocking, effeminate manner that was clearly meant to emulate that of a "gay" person's voice. He then called out my name, waving and pointing. The message was clear, "Alan is gay." My entire bus just looked at me. Kids on the other buses did the same. They began to point and laugh. I endured more incidents like that than I care to recall.

As I transitioned to junior high and high school, I did a lot to repackage my image and worked hard to overcome anything that would hint that I might be gay. I'm not sure I did a great job, but most of my classmates finally decided they liked me. In my early adulthood, I began to seriously consider how to deal with my struggle with same-sex attraction. The world around me was shifting. The culture's beliefs and attitudes about homosexuality were changing. What had long been the position of Hollywood started rubbing off on Main Street. Eventually, after trying it I decided that Hollywood's views were based on the illusion of a contented gay life that

conflicted with my deepest beliefs. I turned to the ministry I now lead, Exodus International, for support and they helped me unravel scars from the past and inspired me with hopes for the future.

It was during this time of transition that one of my classmates told me that the leader of the cruel attacks I endured in 6th grade had come out as gay himself. I did feel some empathy for him, but the fact that he was launching an all out verbal assault on me while he was struggling with the same issues was tough to reconcile. He was the most popular, accepted kid in our class and could have used his popularity to help me, a “geek,” but instead shunned me and encouraged others to do the same. I guess insecure people often displace their insecurity by demonizing others.

Fast-forward more than 20 years later to now—where the social climate as well as the opportunity for rejection is still changing and evolving. We now have various social networking sites such as YouTube, MySpace and Facebook. For those of you who aren’t familiar with Facebook, you have to send or receive a “friend request” in order to connect with someone. I’ve sent and received many from old classmates—good friends and casual acquaintances.

One day as I was perusing my list of friends, I noticed that two of my good buddies from high school had all of the sudden disappeared from my “friend” list. I wondered if it had anything to do with my “controversial” life or my “controversial” career. So I emailed them and asked. My suspicions were confirmed. Talk about hypocritical. I have 1,300 friends on Facebook (sarcastic “Woo Hoo!” to follow) many of whom by no means live moral lives, vote the way I would or even believe in God. I know several who are openly gay and others who outright reject my faith. I choose to befriend those who are diametrically opposed to the life I have chosen to live and yet I am rejected for my “bigoted” and “intolerant” views.

People of faith who choose to surrender their sexuality to Christ and who choose to live their lives in a way that is different than the culture's new normal are now the new social outcasts. It's obvious that people of faith in general are in the same category. I was just reading that California's Prop. 8 opponents are now circulating maps identifying the personal homes of individuals who financially supported Prop. 8 in order to harass their families and shame their views! Unbelievable.

Many students will risk the rejection of their peers and subject themselves to outright discrimination on April 20 to stand up for biblical truth on campuses nationwide on the Day of Truth. This annual event originated five years ago to affirm every students' constitutional right to free speech and to provide an opportunity to have an honest conversation about sexuality. These students will courageously join their voices with the more than 13,000 others who in years past have done just that. I stand with them as someone who has experienced the freedom truth brings and I am reminded that we are in good company. Jesus was a social outcast. He told us we would be too in 1 John 3:13, "Do not be surprised, my brothers, if the world hates you," and in John 15:18, "If the world hates you, keep in mind that it hated me first." He considered us worth the rejection of the world. May we consider those who reject us worth the same.

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