

Looking From Outside the Church Clique

I felt my face prickle with heat but this time it wasn't a hot flash. It was the humiliating realization that I was a Have-Not in this particular place and time and there was nothing I could do to change that.

We all know they exist: the Haves and the Have-Nots.

First there are the Haves. Those who are accepted in a specific environment—the peeps, the gang, the Sistahs. They're quietly respected; the natural leaders who others seem to automatically fall in line behind.

Often they're the ones with the highest skill level or who have achieved the most acclaim or accomplishments within the tribe. They aren't necessarily boastful or cocky; some are actually quite humble. But they definitely belong and everyone knows it. It's a given.

Then there are the Have-Nots. They're the ones who might hang out with the group, but somehow are not the same. They're on a different level—a slightly lower level—and although the Haves may be friendly enough, and include them as part of the whole, there's an invisible barrier that separates them, and they're never really *in* the group, only *with* the group.

You know exactly what I mean. Right?

We've all been in situations where we're the Haves, and other situations where we're the Have-Nots. Naturally, we gravitate toward the former and avoid the latter if at all possible. Nobody wants to feel like a K-Mart purse in a rack full of Pradas.

I recently came across the terrific advice: "Go where you're

celebrated, not where you're tolerated."

A good idea to bolster sagging self-esteem, surely, but not something we can always do. Sometimes, the circumstances of life toss us into groups of people where we may be unknown, disrespected, unappreciated and dreadfully uncomfortable. But we must stay there for one reason or another.

I was in one of those just last week. In fact, it won't be the last time; I'll be affiliated with that same group of people superior to me for many weeks to come. After I came home feeling wretched from being repeatedly stuffed onto the bottom shelf, or worse yet, ignored completely, I realized that I was going to have to find some way to endure the situation, because it wasn't going away.

It was going to feel like being chosen last for the eighth-grade kickball team every single week for the entire school year.

So I prayed: *Lord, throw me a life preserver—some sort of tool that will help me hold my head up and shoulders back when I'm with these people. I know they're better than me at this particular activity, and my best never will be good enough from their perspective. So please help me endure. No, not just endure, but enjoy myself ... if that's even possible.*

And wouldn't you know? He sent me a message. A very important message that helped me glory in my smallness. A special reminder that Papa God delights in making small things great.

"His mighty arm has done tremendous things! He has scattered the proud and haughty ones. He has brought down princes from their thrones and exalted the humble" (Luke 1:51-52, NLT).

So I'm going to return to that group this week with a new attitude. I will be smiling. I will be gracious. Because I have a secret. I know something they don't. It's OK if I'm on the bottom rung of the ladder, because one day we "lowlies"

will be exalted. And I may even get to be the kickball captain!

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