

# Inclusion

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*The Wolf Shall Dwell with the Lamb*

*The Bush Was Blazing But Not Consumed*

*Sacred Acts, Holy Change*

*The Word at the Crossings*

*Finding Intimacy in a World of Fear*

# Inclusion

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## *Making Room for Grace*

**Eric H. F. Law**



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*For Gurdon Brewster,  
my mentor, my priest,  
who inspired me many years ago  
to dedicate my life  
to the ministry of inclusion*



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## Introduction

Inclusion and diversity are words that are used frequently these days. Although much material justifies our being inclusive and appreciating diversity, there is a lack of resources and training in practical, theologically based approaches to enabling a community to act inclusively when its boundary is challenged. Church leaders, both experienced and new, often discover that good intention is not enough to create an inclusive community. This book seeks to fill this gap by providing practical and theologically sound theories, models, and skills that are necessary for moving a faith community toward greater inclusion.

In my previous two books, *The Wolf Shall Dwell with the Lamb* and *The Bush Was Blazing but Not Consumed*, I laid out the foundational skills, theories, and theologies from a leadership perspective for creating inclusive community. They include skills for bringing together people of diverse backgrounds and techniques required to create an environment that will not favor one group over another, but will support and affirm each group, enabling them to dialogue constructively for the purpose of building a stronger, more faithful community. Many of the techniques and processes named in this volume came from my last two books.

In this volume I focus on the process of inclusion from a community perspective. When I address the issue of inclusion this way, I am, in effect, speaking to the insiders of a community, especially to those who have leadership roles, power, and influence in the community. (Seeking to be included from an outsider's perspective is a different process, requiring a different

set of analysis, skills, and theology that will require a separate volume to explore.) As I wrote on the subject, I discovered a lack of vocabulary and clarity in the way we use our language regarding inclusion. I found myself inventing new phrases like “boundary challenge,” “boundary function,” and “grace margin” to carry on this task of describing the process of inclusion. Readers might find these terms to be jargon, but the terms will have to do for now, since the English language does not provide too many useful vocabularies for our purpose. Also, we do not have a workable definition of the word *inclusion* used to consider people and community life. I would like to present my working definition of inclusion here. In chapter 4, I will explain how I arrived at this definition:

Inclusion is a discipline of extending our boundary to take into consideration another’s needs, interests, experience, and perspective, which will lead to clearer understanding of ourselves and others, fuller description of the issue at hand, and possibly a newly negotiated boundary of the community to which we belong.

Chapters 5 through 10 further explore and describe the inclusion process in Christian theological terms and practical facilitation skills and processes. At the end of each of these chapters are suggested techniques, processes, and programmatic strategies that can prepare a community to respond better to its boundary challenges. Although this book is intended to be an independent resource, I found it hard, especially in chapter 9, not to make references to the techniques, skills, and processes that I described in my previous two books. To gain a fuller and more in-depth reading of the later chapters, readers may want to read my previous two books first if they have not done so.

The central purpose of the process and model described in this book is to enable a community to extend its boundary to include an outsider’s experience and perspective in a constructive and faithful way. This process is about transformation

of a community from within, moving from being an exclusive community toward being a gracious, inclusive body of Christ. My hope is that you, the readers, will gain a sense of clarity and a practical approach to the discipline of inclusion. I pray that you will incorporate the theology that supports inclusion in your daily life and in communities in which you belong.



# 1

## **Now That Faith Has Come: Resisting the Impulse to Exclude**

When I started working on this book, I had difficulty focusing on the central topic: inclusion. Whenever I got close to writing down an idea, my train of thought would be intercepted by these questions: But what about *how* we exclude? How would I deal with all the justifications for exclusion coming from my readers? Immediately, I would think of the many ways that we exclude through our prejudices, discrimination, racism, sexism, ageism, homophobia, and so on. My mind would race around in circles in this arena of exclusion. Then I caught myself. Why am I doing this? There are plenty of books published on the different “isms” and how they exclude. What can I say that has not been said? What is needed is a body of literature on the other side of the equation—how do we include? With that I would attempt to focus on the subject of inclusion again. After going through this pattern a few times, I finally gave in to the need to dwell in the arena of exclusion. I figured that if I wrote about exclusion for at least a short while, I could exorcize and cleanse my mind of it so that I could spend the rest of my energy on describing inclusion. This short play and the pages that follow are the result of that endeavor.

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### **A Dialogue between Two Children of God**

*Child 1:* God loves me.

*Child 2:* God loves me too.

*Child 1:* How can that be?

*Child 2:* Why not?

*Child 1:* Because God loves me.

*Child 2:* That doesn't mean God can't love me.

*Child 1:* Yes, it does.

*Child 2:* Why?

*Child 1:* Because I'm older and God loved me first.

*Child 2:* That's not fair.

*Child 1:* You don't expect God to love me all these years and then suddenly change his mind and love you just because you show up, do you?

*Child 2:* Why can't God love more than one person?

*Child 1:* Of course God can do that. It's just that God can't love you.

*Child 2:* Why?

*Child 1:* Because I don't like you.

*Child 2:* What does that have to do with anything?

*Child 1:* If God loves me and I don't like you, how can God possibly love you?

*Child 2:* You're mean.

*Child 1:* Say all you want, but you won't get God to love you.

*Child 2:* Why?

*Child 1:* Because I told him not to.

*Child 2:* You can't tell God what to do!

*Child 1:* Of course I can. God and I are real buddies.



*Child 2:* I don't think God likes being told what to do.

*Child 1:* You can if he loves you.

*Child 2:* I think you're going to hell.

*Child 1:* What?!

*Child 2:* God says, "Don't judge, lest you be judged."

*Child 1:* Where did you hear that?

*Child 2:* It's in the Bible. Since you judged me, I will tell God to judge you, so you are definitely going to hell.

*Child 1:* You can't do that.

*Child 2:* If you can tell God what to do, so can I.

*Child 1:* But you don't even know God.

*Child 2:* I don't know *your* god, but I know mine.

*Child 1:* Are you saying there are two different gods?

*Child 2:* Yeah, one loves you, and one loves me. And I don't think they get along in heaven.

*Child 1:* That's because my god is better.

*Child 2:* No, my god is nicer.

*Child 1:* My god is stronger

*Child 2:* My god is smarter.

*Child 1:* My god is bigger.

*Child 2:* My god is prettier.

*Child 1:* Wait a minute. This doesn't sound right.

*Child 2:* What doesn't sound right?

*Child 1:* I thought there is only one God.

*Child 2:* Where did you hear that?

*Child 1:* It says so in the Bible.

*Child 2:* Then your god must be a fake.

*Child 1:* No, my god is the real one, and your god must be Satan.

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*Child 2:* How dare you insult my god!

*Child 1:* You are going to burn in the eternal fire of hell, Satan-worshiper!

*Child 2:* You are going to be chopped up into a million pieces for insulting my god!

*Child 1:* I hate you.

*Child 2:* I hate you too.

*Child 1:* I'll kill you.

*Child 2:* I'll kill you first because the real god is on my side.

*Child 1:* No, you have Satan on your side; you will definitely die first.

*(They fight. Then one kills the other and goes on to argue with another child of God.)*

Like the two children in this fictional play, we also have the tendency to exclude others just because they are different. Furthermore, for religious groups, we often bring God into the situation to justify our acts of exclusion. I wish I could say that all of us are born with an accepting attitude that appreciates differences, but in reality we tend to react to differences in negative and exclusive ways, especially early in our lives. For example, when young boys or girls discover the existence of the opposite sex, their reaction is not "Isn't that interesting? Let me learn more about you." Rather, their initial reaction is most likely a negative one, so they form boy groups and girl groups that are exclusive of each other. Over time, as we mature, we work through these initially negative reactions and learn to accept and appreciate the differences between genders. We even go out of our way to learn to live with the opposite sex, as demonstrated by the large quantity of literature addressing the differences between men and women published in the 1980s and 1990s.

However, the impulse to use exclusion as a means to deal with other kinds of differences remains with most of us even

into adulthood. We have a yearning for stability and the familiar. By excluding those who are different, we don't have to work so hard to interact with new faces with "foreign" backgrounds and histories. In our comfortable group, we know all the rules; we know what to expect from each other; and we can be ourselves. But the world as God has created it is full of diversity. No matter how hard we try to isolate ourselves from these diversities, they are all around us. The moment we step outside our homes into our neighborhoods, our schools, or our workplaces, we cannot help but encounter people who are different. The differences that we have to deal with are, first of all, those basic diversity dimensions that exist within the human family—ethnicity, racial identity, gender, age, physical ability, and sexual orientation.

Beyond the above basic dimensions of diversity, which are mostly unchangeable, are other diversity dimensions we must consider, such as education, marital status, parental status, geographic location, work experience, military experience, religion, and economic status.<sup>1</sup> I would add theological difference as a dimension that most churches need to be aware of in considering the spectrum of diversity.

We may presume people who are different to be a threat to the safety and stability of our community. In order to protect ourselves from this perceived threat, we sometimes exclude others by insulating ourselves from them, or by shutting others out. We exclude others by ostracizing them, engaging in outright rejection of the differing others. We discriminate against them. We segregate them. We put up rules and criteria for acceptance, and then pronounce that there is no exception. We make up lies about how they are inferior and suggest that they might even be inhuman.

As I was writing the above paragraph, I realized the enormous number of words in the English language that we have

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<sup>1</sup>The list of primary and secondary dimensions of diversity follow closely the diversity list provided by Marilyn Loden and Judy B. Rosener, *Workforce America! Managing Employee Diversity as a Vital Resource* (Homewood, Ill.: Business One Irwin, 1991).

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available to describe exclusion: *omission, ostracism, segregation, apartheid, banishment, deletion, deportation, discrimination, elimination, exemption, exile, expulsion, exception, expurgation, rejection, removal*, and so on. When I think about verbs that we use to exclude, there are even more choices: *ban, bar, blackball, blacklist, boycott, cut off, delete, disregard, drop, eject, eliminate, excommunicate, expel, forbid, insulate, isolate, omit, ostracize, overlook, prevent, prohibit, reject, segregate, separate, shun, shut out*, and so on.

“What about words for inclusion in the English language?”

I started to wonder. “What words are available to me in writing a book on the subject of inclusion?” So I looked in the thesaurus that was available in my computer’s word processing software. I was shocked to find only three synonyms for inclusion: *insertion, addition, and enclosure*. On further examination, I noticed these three words were all meant to be used to describe the inclusion of objects, not people. I then checked for synonyms of the verb form of inclusion. I was happy to discover that there were more choices in the verb department, but again the choices were mostly verbs describing inclusion of objects — for example, *comprise, consist of, constitute, contain, entail, cover, insert, interject*, and so forth. When I eliminated those verbs that imply inclusion of objects only, I was left with *embody, embrace, encompass, incorporate, and involve*.

No wonder we are so ready to dive into the language and action of exclusion when we are faced with a group or person who is different. Our language, which is indicative of our cultural values, supplies a long list of expressions for exclusion but gives very little support for expressions of inclusion. And most expressions of inclusion are of objects, not of people. As a result, many of our efforts in the past to include people have treated those human beings that we were trying to include as objects to be moved around. Inclusion then became inserting the right number of people of each kind into the organization so that the organization would consist of the right percentage of the necessary different kinds of people. We paid little attention to what happened to them once they were “inserted.”

Perhaps one of the reasons for the scarcity of words to articulate the inclusion of people is that the inclusion of people is a fairly new concept in the English language. Another reason may be that inclusion seems much more complicated than exclusion. Exclusion is simple. Once we reject the others, we don't have to deal with them anymore. We can go back to business as usual—no change, no hassle, no worries. It's clean. It requires little time, money, and energy. Inclusion involves a great deal of thinking and listening when we take into consideration others' experience, history, feelings, and so forth. Inclusion requires time and energy to follow up after a group or person has been physically included. It requires that everyone readjust. It requires change. Once a group is embraced in our circle, we have to live with its members for an unspecified period of time. That prospect can be very unsettling.

In all accounts, exclusion seems to be the more appealing choice when it comes to dealing with people who are different. This may be the reason I kept getting stuck in writing and thinking about exclusion when I was trying to articulate inclusion. This may be why we unconsciously choose exclusion time and again as a means to address differences.

Not only do we go straight to acts of exclusion ourselves, we also project our need to exclude onto God through our selective use of the Bible. We are quick to quote chapters and verses to support exclusion. After all, didn't Jesus drive the money changers out of the temple at Jerusalem? Didn't Jesus rail against the scribes and the Pharisees? (Mt. 23:1–36; Lk. 11:37–54) Didn't Jesus say that it was harder for a rich person to enter the kingdom of heaven than to put a camel through the eye of a needle? (Mt. 19:16–30; Mk. 10:17–31; Lk. 18:18–30) Didn't Jesus say that at the end the Son of man will separate the sheep and the goats and that the sheep will be welcome and the goats will be excluded? (Mt. 25:31–46) Didn't Paul excommunicate many people from the church? Didn't Paul say that women were to be submissive to men? We can exclude almost anybody who doesn't fit our ideas of what a

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good Christian is and blame it all on God, Jesus, Paul, and whomever else we can drum up to support exclusion.

There is no point in my arguing that Jesus or Paul or any of the major personalities in the Bible acted exclusively. They did, and so do everyone and every organization, especially the church. Jesus, in order to extend the salvation of God to the excluded—the unclean, the sinners, the tax collectors, the Gentiles, and so on—acted and spoke in judgmental, exclusive terms against the rich, the powerful, and the leaders of the established religion of his time. Jesus, in his passion to uphold the integrity and sacredness of God’s ministry, challenged and drove out those who desecrated the temple of God.

Jesus’ exclusive acts were directed at those who were already in the established religious organizations of his time, especially those who wielded power and influence in religious circles, people such as the scribes and the Pharisees and very often the rich. Jesus rejected their disregard for the essence of the Torah. Jesus rejected their using the law as an instrument of exclusion rather than as a framework for compassion and justice. Jesus rejected them because they should have known better and should have been prepared for the coming of the kingdom in which they would be judged by their acts of compassion and inclusion. They were to be accountable to God as the stewards of God’s ministry, and they were charged with having to “keep awake therefore, for [they] know neither the day nor the hour” (Mt. 25:13).

In the early Christian church communities, acts of exclusion reflected concerns for the health of the formation of a fairly new community. Many of its community principles were derived from the Jewish community. The following passage, which was ascribed to Jesus by Matthew, parallels the Jewish community principles of the time.

If another member of the church sins against you, go and point out the fault when the two of you are alone.  
If the member listens to you, you have regained that

one. But if you are not listened to, take one or two others along with you, so that every word may be confirmed by the evidence of two or three witnesses. If the member refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if the offender refuses to listen even to the church, let such a one be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector.

*Matthew 18:15–17*

Notice the threefold process of interpersonal approaches in dealing with the member who sinned. Only when the interpersonal approaches failed was the person to be treated as a Gentile or a tax collector as the last resort. For the Jewish community of Jesus' time, to be treated as a Gentile or a tax collector was to be excommunicated. However, Jesus himself did not follow that rule of the community. He interacted with Gentiles and tax collectors and sinners by eating with them, being touched by them, and extending his healing power to them. If we are to imitate Jesus in our ministries, we have to balance our acts of exclusion with our acts of compassion and forgiveness. This might be a confusing contradiction, but it is what we are called to do if we take the whole of the gospel seriously. I want to explore this seeming contradiction further in the writings of Paul, to whom are attributed, in the life of the early church, various acts of excommunication.

Paul was concerned with the formation of the church when he had to make exclusive judgment. "For what have I to do with judging those outside? Is it not those who are inside that you are to judge? God will judge those outside. 'Drive out the wicked person from among you'" (1 Cor. 5:12–13). Paul was very clear that when it came to judgment that involved exclusion, it was only to be exercised among those within the community. Paul was saying to the members of the newly born church that they who knew Jesus as the Messiah should know better what was required of them and that they were accountable both to one another and to God. Judgment on those

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outside the community was a different story with a different set of criteria.

Paul, even though he was identified as the one who excommunicated, actually takes a soft approach to maintaining and protecting the early church community. In 2 Thessalonians 3:10, he prescribed withholding food from someone who was unwilling to work.

And for the offense of disobedience, he prescribed, “Have nothing to do with them, so that they may be ashamed” (2 Thess. 3:14). But he added, in his softer voice, tempered no doubt by his obedience to Jesus’ ministry of compassion, “Do not regard them as enemies, but warn them as believers” (2 Thess. 3:15). Paul’s compassionate side showed even more in the following passage, in which he was trying to soften the punishment he had prescribed earlier for a particular member of the community in Corinth.

But if anyone has caused pain, he has caused it not to me, but to some extent—not to exaggerate it—to all of you. This punishment by the majority is enough for such a person; so now instead you should forgive and console him, so that he may not be overwhelmed by excessive sorrow. So I urge you to reaffirm your love for him...Anyone whom you forgive, I also forgive. What I have forgiven, if I have forgiven anything, has been for your sake in the presence of Christ.

*2 Corinthians 2:5–10*

In both the letters to the Thessalonians and Corinthians, the early church did not seem to have very rigid rules regarding excommunication. The rules were based on Jewish community law and, in the last case cited, were modified in accordance with the circumstances. Paul’s actions of judgment were always balanced by his yearning for the community, the body of Christ, to be inclusive, compassionate, and forgiving. But most of all, Paul yearned for unity within the community of Christ.



But avoid stupid controversies, genealogies, dissensions, and quarrels about the law, for they are unprofitable and worthless. After a first and second admonition, have nothing more to do with anyone who causes divisions, since you know that such a person is perverted and sinful, being self-condemned.

*Titus 3:9–10*

Paul's passion for holding the community together forced him to reject anyone who caused division. Jesus was concerned with compassion and the inclusion of the weak, the outcasts, and the outsiders. Therefore, anyone who did not exercise compassion was rejected. In both cases, they were speaking to those who were inside—Jesus speaking to the insiders of the Jewish religious community, and Paul speaking to the insiders of the early Christian community. Again, I do not dispute the fact that both Jesus and Paul acted exclusively. But I am quick to point out that the acts of exclusion were a last resort in most of the cases. I also want to point out that the stories, acts, and quotes from the Bible that support inclusion far outnumber those dealing with exclusion. Many of the incidents and stories of inclusion concerned the inclusion of those who were outsiders.

I can readily think of story after story, quote after quote that support inclusion from the Christian scriptures—the parable of the prodigal son (Lk. 15:11–32); the parable of the lost sheep (Mt. 18:10–14; Lk. 15:1–7); the parable of the good Samaritan (Lk. 10:29–37); Jesus' healing of lepers (Lk. 5:12–16; 17:11–19; Mt. 8:1–3; Mk. 1:40–45); Jesus' talking to the Samaritan woman at the well (Jn. 4:1–42); Jesus' discourse with the Canaanite woman who asked Jesus to heal her child (Mt. 15:21–28; Mk. 7:24–30); Jesus' dealing with the woman who was caught in adultery (Jn. 7:53–8:11) and with the woman with a reputation, weeping and wiping his feet with her hair (Lk. 7:36–50); Jesus' healing of the woman with the hemorrhage

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(Lk. 8:42–48); the healing of the centurion’s slave (Lk. 7:1–10); Jesus’ healing of the son of the Gentile military officer (Jn. 4:46–54); and Jesus’ commissioning the disciples to be his witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth (Acts 1:8).

Many of the passages cited above record Jesus’ dissatisfaction with the established religion of the time’s use of the laws as a vehicle to exclude the powerless, poor, and weak. He was also dissatisfied with the exclusion of the Gentiles and Samaritans from the salvation of God, which was to be for all people and nations. It was so easy for the religious leaders to deal with differences by using exclusion. They only needed to apply the laws and it was done. According to the rules, if you were a Samaritan, you were not one of us, and, therefore, we would not even talk to you. But Jesus not only talked to Samaritans, he extended the salvation of God to them. According to the rules, if you were a sinner, you were therefore excluded. Jesus ate with sinners and tax collectors, prostitutes and beggars. According to the rules, children and women had no voice in the community. Jesus included children and women in many of his acts and sayings and parables. Jesus spent much of his ministry countering and resisting exclusion and acted in such a radical, inclusive way that the establishment had to stop him. Jesus’ ministry has forever changed the boundary of his religious community—from one of fast and easy exclusion of those considered different to one of inclusion based on compassion and justice.

Paul also recognized this ministry of inclusion. One must remember that Paul was a Pharisee, one of those who at that time followed and applied the letter of the law. His conversion in recognizing Jesus as the Messiah changed his perception of the law forever. In his energetic and passionate letter to the Galatians, he articulated this change very clearly.

Now before faith came, we were imprisoned and guarded under the law until faith would be revealed. Therefore the law was our disciplinarian until Christ

came, so that we might be justified by faith. But now that faith has come, we are no longer subject to a disciplinarian, for in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith. As many of you as were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ.

*Galatians 3:23–27*

Now that faith has come, the process of deciding who is in and who is out of the community of God has changed from a rule-based, right-or-wrong, exclusive approach to one that is Christ-centered. Look at the acts of inclusion that follow in the community of Christ recorded in the Christian scriptures: the Pentecost event, where “Jews from every nation” gathered and heard “God’s deeds of power” (Acts 2:1–47); the commissioning of the seven Hellenists to solve the dispute about exclusion by the Hebrews (Acts 6:1–7); the conversion of Cornelius, the first Gentile convert by Peter (Acts 10:1–48); Paul and Barnabas’ visit to Jerusalem in defense of the Gentile Christians (Acts 15:1–35); Paul’s image of the body of Christ as inclusive of people with different gifts (1 Cor. 12:12–31); Paul’s words on not passing premature judgment (1 Cor. 4:1–5); and Paul’s words following the above Galatians passage:

There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus.

*Galatians 3:28*

In conclusion, the language of exclusion in the Bible was addressed to those who were already part of the religious community. Even in these cases, exclusion was the last resort. One of the major criteria for exclusion was whether one acted compassionately and inclusively toward the outcasts. Jesus and Paul used totally different sets of language and actions when addressing those who were outside the community. When we use the language of exclusion that was meant for insiders to block outsiders who are trying to get in, we are misusing the

scripture. Sayings, acts, and images of inclusion stemming from Christ's ministry recorded in the Christian scriptures far outnumber those of exclusion. Exclusion has its place in the preservation of the community, but it should not overshadow the work of including those who are outside the community. Inclusion of outsiders weighs much more than the preservation of the existing community.

My plea to readers is that you resist the impulse to exclude. I invite you to reject the temptation to blame God and the Bible for your acts of exclusion. My hope is that the pages that follow will clarify and define the inclusion process from a Christian perspective. I pray that this book will encourage you to begin addressing any differences you may have with the inclusion process. Even when you have strong urges to walk the easy path of exclusion, I invite you to take the advice of Robert Frost's poem (and the title of Scott Peck's book), to take "the road less traveled." Choose the road of inclusion—a more difficult road that involves much more time, energy, patience, and faith in God through Christ, who will lead, push, redirect, and nurture you along the way.