

Do You Know Who is Sitting Right Next to You?

If you're a regular reader of books (and I hope you are), there's one part of a book I'll venture you rarely pay attention to: the margins. Every book and magazine has margins, but we never notice them.

In his book, *Jesus in the Margins*. Rick McKinley, pastor of Imago Dei Community in Portland, Oregon, wrote that society has margins just like a book. Unlike the blank margins in a book, though, society's margins are full of people.

"Society—our world, our culture—has margins just like this book does. They're places occupied by people who go unnoticed, misfits who seldom figure in when the mainline world defines and esteems itself. But they're there." —Rick McKinley, *Jesus in the Margins*

We don't notice them, but they're there. People in the margins. Even our secular culture recognizes this and has a name for them: marginalized. People pushed to the periphery.

So if Jesus launched His ministry in America in 2022, where would He go? He'd hang out among the people in the margins. After all, those are the kind of people He spent time with in the first century. Tax collectors. Sinners. Those who didn't fit normal society.

You probably assume I'm going to turn this blog into a call to start a ministry to the marginalized in society. And why not? Our society has a lot of "misfits"—those who may look out of place in our white-bread suburban evangelical churches—and they need Jesus. Yes, that would be a good thing to do, but ...

Reach out to the marginalized in your church.

They're there—right there in *your* church. You just don't notice them. After all, *they're in the margins*.

- The awkward teenager who comes to church but doesn't hang out with the other students.
- The single adult man who dresses badly and has that annoying laugh.
- The shy "wallflower" who's there every week, sitting quietly, hoping someone will talk to her.

- The family that attends regularly. They don't lead in any way; they don't volunteer. They're not stand-offish or unfriendly, but no one really engages them in conversation. And no one knows their family is falling apart.

Society is full of marginalized people—and so is the church. These are people who love Jesus like you do, but they're on the fringes: socially awkward, uncomfortable to be around, living in tough situations, and not quite fitting the niche of your group. **They're in the margins—right where Jesus is.**

And that's where we should be too.

In teaching about His return, Jesus spoke of separating the people as a shepherd would separate sheep from goats. He told this about the sheep:

"Then the King will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father; inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. or I was hungry and you gave me something to eat; I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink; I was a stranger and you took me in; I was naked and you clothed me; I was sick and you took care of me; I was in prison and you visited me'" (Matt. 25:34-36).

The sheep responded with surprise. They did not realize that, as they cared for these marginalized people, they were ministering to the King. "And the King will answer them, 'Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me'" (v. 40).

Here's the kicker. Jesus called these marginalized people "brothers."

The marginalized include our brothers and sisters in Christ. Next time you're gathered at church, look around. They're sitting with you. They may even be in your Bible study group. But don't just notice them. Talk to them. Build a relationship with them. Love them. Support them. Encourage them.

'Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me'" (v. 40).