

## SUBURBANITIS HAS GOT TO STOP

If there is one thing I've learned since I've been in prison it's that people living in the suburbs going to suburban churches are so stuck in our suburban bubbles and mindset that the second something doesn't go our way or someone comes into our bubble who doesn't fit our suburban, elitist, all-about-me-and-my-profile attitude, we pull out our guns of judgment and fire away. And watch out if it's a *religious* "all-about-truth" suburbanite because they skip the entire judgment part and go right to screaming, "**Crucify him! Crucify him!**" like it's some cheer at a football game. Those kinds seem to feed off the flesh of any sheep that has a single defect. After a year in my new training facility, I have seen just how ruthless, uncaring, uncompassionate, and un-Christ-like most of us suburbanites really are. It's high time we start turning this train around before we destroy the kingdom of God from within.



First of all, let's discuss judgment for a second. Where does it come from and why are we so good at it? **Judgment** comes from nothing other than selfish pride. It is an elitist mindset that believes that we are superior to the rest and that those who don't meet our standards are inferior. It's that simple. Unrighteous judgment is just that...*unrighteous*.

Judgment comes from a *lack of compassion*, understanding, and love for our fellow man. We get offended when we hear someone drop the f-bomb in Walmart and we get angry when we see a mom verbally abuse her children in Costco. Why? Because they're not meeting our polished, self-absorbed, suburban standard? The second you cross your eyebrows at that woman in Costco and cover your kids' ears in disgust you are becoming the very person that Jesus/Yeshua couldn't stand...a judgmental Pharisee. Can you imagine the Son of Man saying, "**OMG, I can't believe that person just berated her kids like that in front of me! How dare they?! Don't they know**

*who I am?"* I hope that sounds as ludicrous as it felt to write it. His response would never be judgmental. It would go something like this: "Father, I pray for this woman right now and ask that you would heal her heart and release her from all the hurt, pain, and anger that she's been carrying all these years." That is the Yeshua *I* know. **That** is the love of God.

My friends, the truth is that we really don't love people. Listen to what I'm about to say. We love people **LIKE US!** We love people that we have a grid for, that we understand, that are in our bubble. How do I know? Because those same words described me until God popped my bubble with the tip of the sword of the Spirit. Now I hear no less than 200 curse words a day and the rest is just as bad. God had to break me of my suburbanite cancer where everything fit into a nice little box with a little red bow. He had to show me how to love people right....where....they.....are.....at. **Period.**

For the first time in my life, I understand why Yeshua ate with tax collectors and talked to prostitutes while his disciples stood afar, offended at the fact that He was doing so. Jesus loved people. He knew where they were at. He had compassion for them. He didn't expect them to immediately memorize the Torah, keep every feast day, or even to stop cussing. He knew the power of the Spirit and understood that all He had to do was feed them a little something that would bring them back for more and let the love of God do the rest. Nothing ever shocked Him surprised Him, or offended Him. Incredibly, the only real offense He ever had was against the **"church"** people He called **"hypocrites"**(Mat. 23:27), **"a brood of vipers"** (Mat. 12:34), **"whitewashed [suburbanite] tombs"** (Mat. 23:27), etc..." I'm pretty sure He wouldn't have been able to stand the suburbanites, either.

I have a confession to make. As much as I tried to love and care about people as a believer and as a pastor, I had no idea what on earth I was doing or how to do it like He did before I came to prison. My compassion was nowhere near where it needed to be and my patience was nothing compared to Christ's. I was simply never put in a situation where I was forced to learn about those on the **"other side of the tracks."** When a mean drug dealer tells you that his sister used to rape him when he was eight years old, that his father beat him with ropes and car belts, that he was beaten up every day in school for being short and wearing glasses, that he's been shot twice, had five wives, and been swindled by every pastor he ever met your heart breaks and you begin to see him in a whole new light.

The **"bad day"** you have when you're stuck in traffic too long wanes into nothing when you hear the man talk about only having seen his son once or the fact that his daughter refuses to even open the letters he's been writing to her from prison for years. Where once I was judgmental when this new believer would get too angry when he lost at chess, I can now see how far he's come and that this is just where he's currently at. I was judging based on the standard of perfection which is a symptom of *surbanitis*. Most Christians would say *"I can't believe that person calls himself a Christian and acts that way! He is nowhere near God!"* But Yeshua would say, *"I have saved him from the pits of hell and am so proud of him for coming this far. He has changed so much and is seeking me with all his heart. Now let's see if we can work on this anger problem a little more."* **That** is love. **That** is compassion. **That** is looking past the past, past the present, and believing in someone's future.

I was out there in suburbia until a little over a year ago. Shoot, my wife still drives a Suburban! And I remember before I ever got indicted a time I was at the mall with my family, and I saw a man with tattoos all over his leg playing with his children in the playground area. He had a federal ankle bracelet on and was clearly on parole. I remember thinking to myself, "I wonder what crime he committed," instead of, "What a blessing that he's out of prison and allowed to play with his children like that. Father, I pray you will bless that man and protect him from ever having to go back." Tears roll down my face as I write this because I would give my right arm to wear an ankle bracelet and play with my children again. I had a severe case of suburbanitis and the Father knew just the remedy for it. He's making me live on the "other side of the tracks" for a while so I can truly **learn to love people right....where....they....are....at.**

Friends, we need to **STOP**. We don't know people. We don't know the situation, where they came from, what they've been through, or what they're going through now. We simply have no right to look down on anyone for anything. We are called to love our neighbor. It doesn't say love your brother in Christ as yourself. It says our neighbor. And our neighbor is everyone, even those we don't like. Hurt people hurt people, and they need hugs, too. Is light really light if it is never dark? How is the dark ever going to see light if we don't take it to them? So stop keeping your light under your suburban bushel and burn that thing bright in this dark world that we have to live in. We don't have to be *of* the world, but we must be ***in*** it. Look past people's messiness, their anger, and their sin, and love them as the Lord loved you. He looked past yours, didn't He? He doesn't judge you when you lose it with your wife, when you curse in the car when someone cuts you off, or when you cheat at work. He doesn't condone it, but He loves you through it. He is a patient God, and He is ever so lovingly inching you toward the finish line where you need to be.

So, what's the cure for suburbanitis? Love and forgiveness, compassion and kindness. Give it away. ***It just feels good.***

Jim Staley