

LABELS:

Seeing As God Sees

LABELS:

Seeing As God Sees

Justin Morton

Something To Think About

Copyright © 2014 by Justin Morton.

All rights reserved.

Visit Something-To-Think-About.com

Other Books by Justin:

Help! Someone I Love Has Died

How Great Is Our God

WASTED! A Study on Solomon

Wisdom for Life: A Study of Proverbs

All Scripture quotations, unless otherwise indicated, are taken from the Holy Bible, English Standard Version® (ESV®), copyright © 2001 by Crossway, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

AUTHOR



Justin Morton is the Student and Family Minister at the Karns Church of Christ in Knoxville, TN. He is married to the beautiful Miranda Morrison Morton and they have one awesome son, Caden.

He is a graduate of Freed-Hardeman University with both, a Bachelor of Arts and Master Degrees. His passion is helping young people build a lasting relationship with Jesus. Justin is the director of the Southeast Institute of Biblical Studies Leadership Camp held each year in June.

Justin is the author of two books for teens, *Help! Someone I Love Has Died* and *How Great Is Our God*. He maintains a website with free resources at something-to-think-about.com

“Wait!” Seeing Past the Label

I’ve often wondered how many times I’ve allowed a person’s label to stand between us. How many times have I seen a person whose label is different than mine, and turned away from them as if they are not important?

Every day, all over the world, people are ignored and overlooked because their label is different. People sit alone in the lunch room because their label is different. People walk down the hallway at work alone because their label is different. People sit at home by themselves when everyone else is going out and having fun because their label is different. A person’s label can keep them from enjoying some of the simple things that a lot of us take for granted.

How many times have we ignored a person because their label was different than ours? How many times have we overlooked people because their label was seen as one that is negative? How many times have we not been able to see past a person's label?

Not too long ago, I read a letter that a 30 year old with Down Syndrome wrote to a well known person in our society because of a tweet she tweeted. While watching the Presidential debate, she tweeted our current President was a retard. This young man wrote an open letter in response to this woman's tweet talking about how it was obvious she meant the word retard in a negative way. It is a label our society has given to those with handicaps to indicate they are different than everyone else.

Consider your own life for a moment. Does the label you've been given ever get in the way of your social life or your social status? Most of us do not like it when people label us and reject us based on those labels. Yet, we do the very same thing to others, most likely on a daily basis.

Jesus was Different

When you think of Jesus, what comes to your mind? The cross, love, compassion, death, resurrection, miracles, etc. What about the word different? Does this word ever come to your mind when you think about Jesus? The more I read about Jesus and study His life, the more I realize how different He truly was.

There are a lot of things that make Jesus different, but one I see over and over when reading through the Gospel accounts is how Jesus treated people, especially people who

were labeled in a negative way. Jesus was able to see past a person's label!

Jesus Heals a Leper

Lepers lived a miserable life. If a person had leprosy, the priest would pronounce him or her unclean and they would be banished from their homes, and placed in what was known as a leper colony. Lepers would live there as long as they had leprosy because the disease was highly contagious.

Just imagine how miserable living like this would be. You would forever be separated from physical contact with those you love because you have a contagious disease. There would be no more hugging your children or kissing your wife every day. The moment one was pronounced a leper, their life completely changed.

If a leper were ever in a public place, they had to walk on the opposite side of the street and keep their mouths covered while alerting people with a shout that they were unclean. They would live like this for the remainder of their days. How depressing such a life would be.

Leprosy was a label you did not want to have. If you had such a label, people purposely avoided you at all costs. Everyone that is, except Jesus.

Jesus was not the kind of guy who was going to let the way a person was labeled interfere with him having a relationship with them.

In the Gospel of Luke we read, “¹² While he was in one of the cities, there came a man full of leprosy. And when he saw Jesus, he fell on his face and begged him, ‘Lord, if you will, you

can make me clean.’¹³ And Jesus stretched out his hand and touched him, saying, ‘I will; be clean.’ And immediately the leprosy left him” **(Luke 5:12-13)**.

Jesus was different from others. You see, He did not have to touch this leper to heal him. He only had to speak the words of healing. Why would Jesus reach out and touch someone with such a highly contagious disease when He really didn’t have to? Why would He take time out for one many people considered to be a social outcast? Perhaps, Jesus wanted the leprous man to know he was of value in spite of the label he wore.

Jesus was able to see past the label of this leper and offer him a touch of hope. A touch the leper probably thought he would never get again, especially from someone with the

reputation of Jesus. But Jesus was different. He was able to see past a person's label.

Jesus and the Sinful Woman

Jesus was never afraid to associate with anyone. One day he was asked to dine with a Pharisee, a religious leader in the first century. This makes perfect sense. Jesus dining with a man of such respectable reputation is exactly what one would expect to happen. Notice though, how this expected event took an unexpected turn.

"³⁷ And behold, a woman of the city, who was a sinner, when she learned that he was reclining at table in the Pharisee's house, brought an alabaster flask of ointment, ³⁸ and standing behind him at his feet, weeping, she began to wet his feet with her tears and wiped

them with the hair of her head and kissed his feet and anointed them with the ointment.
³⁹Now when the Pharisee who had invited him saw this, he said to himself, “If this man were a prophet, he would have known who and what sort of woman this is who is touching him, for she is a sinner” **(Luke 7:37-39)**.

While they were sitting at the table, probably having a nice religious conversation together, this woman from the city comes in the house. Notice, it appears she was an uninvited guest to this dinner party. Nonetheless, she walks in and interrupts the conversation by falling down at the feet of Jesus. By this point her eyes began to fill up with tears and she started to sob uncontrollably. The tears streamed down her cheeks and began to wet the feet of Jesus. She slowly bent down to the ground and began to wipe the feet of Jesus with her hair.

Just picture this for a moment. This account is both strange and gross at the same time. Who was this woman? What was she doing coming in the home of someone else uninvited, and why was she using her hair to wipe the feet of Jesus clean? Let's be completely honest here, feet are gross. Most of us do not even like our own feet, much less someone else's feet.

As if this account is not strange enough, notice this woman is referred to as a "Woman of the city, who was a sinner." What does that mean? Many scholars believe this gives the indication this woman was a prostitute. With a label like that, she is definitely not the kind of woman religious leaders would want to come in their homes unannounced. This would look bad and could cause a lot of talk among other religious leaders.

While the woman was on the ground kissing and anointing the feet of Jesus, the Pharisee who had not invited this woman to be a guest of his dinner party was blown away by the events taking place. He was thinking to himself, if Jesus were really a prophet, he would know this woman was a prostitute and would have nothing to do with her.

Labels cannot get much worse than this one, can they? If she was a known prostitute, most likely she would have been mocked and ridiculed throughout the city. Imagine what her life might have been like. She probably couldn't go anywhere without people looking at her and snickering. I imagine this woman did not have a lot of friends because no one would want to be seen with her. She was a public disgrace because of what she did for a living.

But again, Jesus was different. He did not see people as others did. Jesus could care less about how others labeled someone. All He cared about was the person who stood, or in this case knelt down, before Him.

Jesus forgave the woman of her sins. She had probably never experienced such grace, mercy and acceptance in her life. But Jesus was able to see past her label of sin and recognize she was a sinner who wanted to be free of her sinful life.

On this day, as Jesus dined with a religious leader, He taught a valuable lesson about how to view others. Never get so caught up in one's label that you forget they are a sinner standing in need of God's love, grace and mercy.

Jesus and Zacchaeus

“He entered Jericho and was passing through.
²And behold, there was a man named Zacchaeus. He was a chief tax collector and was rich. ³And he was seeking to see who Jesus was, but on account of the crowd he could not, because he was small in stature. ⁴So he ran on ahead and climbed up into a sycamore tree to see him, for he was about to pass that way. ⁵And when Jesus came to the place, he looked up and said to him, ‘Zacchaeus, hurry and come down, for I must stay at your house today.’ ⁶So he hurried and came down and received him joyfully. ⁷And when they saw it, they all grumbled, ‘He has gone in to be the guest of a man who is a sinner.’ ⁸And Zacchaeus stood and said to the Lord, ‘Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor. And if I have defrauded anyone of anything, I restore it fourfold.’ ⁹And Jesus said to him, ‘Today salvation has come to

this house, since he also is a son of Abraham.

¹⁰For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost'" (**Luke 19:1-10**).

In this account, we are introduced to a man named Zacchaeus. If you have ever sang the children's song about this man, the one thing you know about Zacchaeus is that he was a "Wee little man and a wee little man was he." However, there is a lot more to this man than just the size of his stature.

Zacchaeus was a chief tax collector. The fact that he was a "Chief" tax collector probably means he was in charge of a certain area and had other tax collectors working under him. This would make Zacchaeus very important in the tax collecting field. There is just one little problem, tax collectors were despised by Jews. They considered tax collectors to be on the same level as sinners. The reason was because

tax collectors were Jews who worked for the Roman government to collect taxes among the people. In the process, many times these tax collectors would defraud their own people, charging more money only to fatten their own wallets. Zacchaeus was nothing more than a traitor to his own people.

Zacchaeus probably did not have many friends. He might have been rich, but he had very few people to share it with. Notice, when Jesus entered Jericho Zacchaeus was unable to see him because of his small stature. Instead of asking some of his buddies to help him out so he could get a good look at Jesus, he climbed up a sycamore tree just so he could see. Why didn't he ask someone for help? Most likely it was because he had no close friends he could ask to help. Zacchaeus was alone because of the label he wore.

Enter Jesus. If you have not figured it out by now, Jesus was different from everyone else. Jesus did not worry about what label a person wore or did not wear. He just cared about the individual.

As Jesus passed through Jericho that day, he looked up at a lonely Zacchaeus and called for him to come down from the tree. Jesus wanted to go to his house and spend time with this man who had a label most people could never see past. Zacchaeus was going to have the one person everyone came to see on this day in his home. Of all the people there that day waiting to see him, why Zacchaeus? Why did Jesus pick the wee little traitor? It is very simple; He was different. Jesus saw past the label.

In all three of the examples discussed, Jesus was able to see past the label everyone else

saw, and see people for who they really were; people in need of a savior.

Beyond the Labels

Do you think Jesus seeing past the labels and treating these individuals differently than everyone else had a profound impact on the lives of these people? Absolutely! How could their lives have not been affected? Go back and read what happened in the end of each of these accounts. All three individuals had their lives forever changed.

When we look past a person's label and see them for who they really are, we will make a difference in their life, just as Jesus made a difference in the lives of those who outwardly wore a negative label.

GALATIANS 6:10

“So then, as we have opportunity, let us do good to everyone...” (Galatians 6:10).

Notice the three key words in this verse: Opportunity, Good and Everyone. When we have opportunities to do good, we should take those opportunities no matter who the person is.

Notice it does not say do good to: your friends, your teammates, the good looking, the funny, the popular, etc. It says do good to EVERYONE! This includes those who might not have the best label. Learn to see past the label!

I want to place a challenge before you. It is a challenge I hope and pray you will take seriously.

CHALLENGE:

Think about someone you know right now, it could be someone at school, someone from work, someone from church or even someone in your family who has a label that affects their life in a negative way.

My challenge for you is to think of ways you can reach out to this person. I want you to pray and ask God to give you the opportunity and the courage to reach out to this person and see them for who they really are. Pray and ask God to give you opportunities to make a difference in this person's life.

I want to leave you with these verses...

"This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you." (**John 15:12**).

"You shall love your neighbor as yourself" (**Matthew 22:39**).

God's Masterpiece

Christian Constantine was born just like everyone else. He was born to parents who loved, cherished and adored him from the moment they first laid eyes on the little guy. Just like us, he was the apple of his parent's eyes. The only difference between Christian and most of us is Christian was born with severe facial deformities.

Christian's deformities were so severe the doctors were unsure whether or not he would survive. They were working with something they were unsure how to deal with properly. You see, Christian's condition was very rare. In fact, there have only been three cases similar to Christian's in the entire world.

Christian's condition was so severe and even unnatural the doctors waited three days before

taking him to his mother. In order to prepare her for what she was going to see, they showed her a picture of Christian first so she could brace herself for what was to come. As you might expect, this was not what his parents were expecting. But according to Christian's mom, "It was love at first sight¹."

Today, Christian is a grown man who has overcome great odds. Since his birth, he has undergone 36 surgeries to reconstruct his face. Just a few years ago, during his first semester in college, Christian was so depressed about the hand he had been dealt, he contemplated suicide. He began to feel as though his life was worthless.

1

<http://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2008/may/06/healthandwellbeing.health>

Many of us have probably felt like Christian Constantine felt at some point in our lives. No, we may not have been born with any major facial defects, but many of us feel as though we were born with some physical deformities.

How many times have you complained about your physical appearance? Consider a few examples: I'm fat, too tall, too short, too thin, my hips are too big, my hair is the wrong color, I hate my nose, my teeth are crooked, my ears are too big, and the list could go on and on. No matter what it is, we have all been there before. We have all felt as if our physical appearance was not good enough.

If you have not felt as if you have some physical deformities, then you have probably felt like you have some amount of spiritual deformities: I can't speak, I don't know what to

say, I could never bring up Jesus to my friends, I can't tell someone, especially a friend, they are lost, I'm not good enough, I sin too much, there is no way God could ever love someone like me, etc.

We all wished we looked, sounded and acted differently, don't we? I know, in my own life, there have been times I prayed to be more like Jesus. The reason we feel like this is because we fail to see ourselves as God sees us. We see ourselves as constantly needing improvement. We may even feel like we are nothing more than junk. If this describes feelings you have, remember this...God sees us differently!

You Are God's Masterpiece!

“For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them” (Ephesians 2:10).

The Greek word for “workmanship” sometimes has the implication of a “Work of art.” When you look in the mirror, do you see yourself as a work of art? Most of us would probably say, “NO, not at all.”

God sees you as the work of art He created you to be. To God you are of great value because you are his masterpiece. Of all the things God created, the world and everything in it included, we are the most special to Him.

When Jesus was preaching His Sermon on the Mount, He said, “Look at the birds of the air: they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they” **(Matthew 6:26)**?

The context behind what Jesus was saying is the idea of worrying and how we should not worry because if God takes care of the birds of the air, He is going to take care of us because we are of more value to Him than the birds of the air. You and I are God’s great masterpiece.

When we look in the mirror, we should see ourselves as God sees us, as His masterpiece! Consider a few of the things that make us a work of art in the eyes of God.

Created in God's Image

When God created man, He said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth. So God created man in his own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them" (Genesis 1:26-27).

Stop! Think about this for a minute. Consider the significance found within these two verses. Man was created in the very image of the creator. We do not read this about any other part of the creation, it is only with man. Thus, being made in God's image makes us the highest of God's creatures. This is the very thing that separates us from the rest of God's amazing creation.

Man and Monkeys

I am sure you have noticed, but just in case you have not, there is a big difference between man and animals. Sure, some women think there is not, but I assure you there are differences. Albeit, maybe not maybe, but there are some I think truly separates man from animal.

Man has Freewill

One of the unique traits God blessed man with is the ability to choose for himself. As humans, we are free to make whatever choices and decisions we want. We can choose to serve God or not. We can choose to be righteous people or not. We can choose to attend a weekly worship service or not. We can choose whatever we desire to choose.

Toward the end of his life, Joshua stood before the people of Israel at Shechem and said, "And if it is evil in your eyes to serve the Lord,

choose this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your fathers served in the region beyond the River, or the gods of the Amorites in whose land you dwell. But as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord" (**Joshua 24:15**).

Joshua stood before the people and told them they had a choice. They could either choose to serve the Lord God or they could choose to serve the gods of the other nations around them. The choice was up to each one of them individually.

Think about what is taking place here for a moment. The children of Israel, God's chosen people, get to choose whether or not they will continue to faithfully serve God. How strange is that? Most kings and people of authority would never give their servants the choice to follow them or someone else. They would most likely even demand they follow them. But

that's not who God is. God gave His people the freedom to decide for themselves whether or not they would choose to follow Him. When God created man He gave man freewill.

Consider the very first person God ever created. After God created Adam, He placed him in the Garden of Eden and told him he could eat of every tree of the garden except one; the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. For when he ate of this tree and only this tree, God told him he would surely die (**Genesis 2:15-17**).

It doesn't sound that hard does it? Just avoid one tree and you will have eternal bliss in the most beautiful garden there ever was. But then it happened...Adam and Eve ate from the one tree God had told them not to eat from. God gave them freewill and they chose to eat of the fruit anyway (**Genesis 3:1-7**).

God could have kept this from happening by not giving Adam and Eve a choice. Instead, He gave them the ability to choose for themselves just as He has all of mankind.

I know some of you may be thinking animals have the able to choose as well. You have witnessed them make the decision to stay close by or run away. You have probably seen them act in a defensive manner around those people they were unfamiliar with. My guess is you may have seen enough to believe animals have freewill just as much as man does.

I guess to a certain extent maybe you are right. Animals do make choice. However, I believe the big difference between the choices of man and animal is man has the freewill to choose whatever he desires and animals make choices (do things) based on instinct. When God

created the animals, he blessed them with a keen sense of instinct. Animals act and do things based on their instinct and not free will. Free will is something God gave to man to distinguish him from all the rest of His creation.

Man has the Ability to Speak

Adam and Eve had made the biggest mistake of their short lives. They had made the decision to eat of the tree which God had told them not to eat from. Listen to what took place after Adam and Eve realized what they had done.

“And they heard the sound of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God among the trees of the garden.

⁹ But the LORD God called to the man and

said to him, 'Where are you?' ¹⁰ And he said, 'I heard the sound of you in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked, and I hid myself.' ¹¹ He said, 'Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten of the tree of which I commanded you not to eat?' ¹² The man said, 'The woman whom you gave to be with me, she gave me fruit of the tree, and I ate.'
¹³ Then the LORD God said to the woman, 'What is this that you have done?' The woman said, 'The serpent deceived me, and I ate'" (**Genesis 3:8-13**).

Do you see the physical interaction between God and man in the previous mentioned verses? After Adam and Eve were disobedient to God, He came walking in the garden looking for them. What happened next shows us one of the significant things to being made in the image of God. God spoke to Adam and

he spoke back. God spoke to Eve and she spoke back. Adam and Eve were both able to communicate with God through physical speech.

Now, you may be wondering what makes this so significant. Well, most of you have probably seen the movie *Doctor Dolittle* starring Eddie Murphy. It's a good movie with a cute storyline about a doctor who discovers he is able to understand and communicate with animals. If you have not seen the movie, give it a try.

What I find funny about the money is the idea animals can talk in a way man can understand. I will admit, there were times I talked to my dog and he responded with a bark which indicated to me that we understood one another. However, if I told you my dog could talk in a way humans could understand, you

would think I was crazy. You might even respond by saying, “Justin, you have lost your mind.”

You would have every right to respond in this way. We all know animals cannot physically talk like we can. Although we might have a few things in common, speaking to communicate is not one of them. God blessed man with this ability and not animals because man was created in His very own image.

Man has an Immortal Soul

The Bible paints a picture of man as being on a different level from all other creatures on the face of the earth. We are special because God created us in His very own image. Not only have we been blessed with freewill and the ability to speak, but man has an immortal soul. The idea is that like God, we have a soul that is eternal, everlasting and undying.

Of all the things God created, you and I are the only part of His creation that will endure all of time and eternity. Plants and animals die and become no more. There are other plants and animals of the same kind, but never the exact same one. Once they die they are forever gone. Man is quite different though. When we die we are not gone forever.

Listen to the words of Jesus concerning this:

“Truly, truly, I say to you, an hour is coming, and is now here, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who hear will live. ²⁶For as the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son also to have life in himself. ²⁷And he has given him authority to execute judgment, because he is the Son of Man. ²⁸Do not marvel at

this, for an hour is coming when all who are in the tombs will hear his voice ²⁹ and come out, those who have done good to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil to the resurrection of judgment" (**John 5:25-29**).

Did you catch what Jesus was said? The time is coming "when all those who are in the tombs will hear his voice." Those who have died and passed from this life will hear the voice of Jesus. How is such possible? They are dead aren't they?

When Jesus and His disciples received word that Lazarus was dead, Jesus responded by saying, "'Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep, but I go to awaken him.' ¹² The disciples said to him, 'Lord, if he has fallen asleep, he will recover.' ¹³ Now Jesus had spoken of his death,

but they thought that he meant taking rest in sleep. ¹⁴Then Jesus told them plainly, ‘Lazarus has died’” (**John 11:11-14**).

Jesus spoke of Lazarus’ death as if he was only sleeping. Why would He do that? Well, look back at what Jesus said in John 5. The time will come when all who are in the tombs will hear his voice and come out.

The day will come when all people, those who are alive and those who have already fallen asleep, will stand before God in judgment. Those who have done good will enter into life eternal and those who have done evil will enter into condemnation.

God created man with an immortal (everlasting) soul, just like him. Of all God’s

creation, we are the only creatures with immortality.

We Were Worth Dying For

At the time of this writing, we have lost over 6,600 men and women in our armed forces since the start of the war in Iraq. If they were able to explain why they enlisted in the armed forces and went to war in the first place, no doubt most would say because they wanted to serve our great country.

Men and women who are willing to sacrifice and put their lives in obvious danger must have a great love for our country. Their love is so great that many times they are willing to die for the cause of their beloved country. For our brave men and women who do this, America must be a very special place.

Can you think of a cause you would be willing to die for? Outside of Christianity and my family, it is hard to say anything else would be worthy of me dying. Honestly, I cannot imagine dying for just any cause, can you?

If we have trouble imagining dying for just any cause, how many of us would be willing to die for our enemies? It is hard to imagine anyone finding something or someone so valuable and special they would be willing to die for that individual, much less their enemies.

Now consider what God has done. For Him, you and I were worth enough to send His son to die on our behalf. When Paul was writing to the Christians in Rome, he reminded them:

“For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. For one will scarcely die for a righteous person, though perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die, but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us”
(Romans 6:6-8).

While we were weak, sinful and ungodly, God demonstrated how special we were to Him by sending His son to die in our place. My friends, it does not get any more special than that. When God looks at you and me He sees someone who is worth dying for. Otherwise, He would have never sent His son to die on the cross of Calvary for our sins.

You Are a Work of Art

Some of you are reading this right now and you have a hard time seeing yourself as someone of value. You have a hard time imagining someone thinking you are important, much less special. When you look in the mirror you do not see a work of art, you see a shameful sinner of no value to anyone, including God.

Too often I am afraid people use the excuse, I am a sinner and I can never change. I have anger, lust, and pride. I am lazy, selfish and greedy. When I look at myself, I see the piece of junk I really am.

Can I let you in on a little secret that's not really a secret at all? God does not see you the way you see yourself when you look in the mirror. God sees you as His work of art, as His

MASTERPIECE. You and I are His most prized creation and that should give us some hope.

I don't know about you, but I am tired of seeing myself through my own eyes. God did not create junk. I am ready to start seeing myself the way God sees me, as His work of art!

What about you? Are you ready to see yourself the way God sees you? Paul wrote, "For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them" (**Ephesians 2:10**).

We are God's MASTERPIECE! Now it is time we started living like it!

CHALLENGE:

Sit down with a pen and paper and write out all the reasons God sees you as His masterpiece. What makes you different from the other people around you? What is it about you that makes God smile. Be sure to write down as many as come to mind.

Spend some time in prayer thanking God for seeing you as His masterpiece. Be sure you thank Him for seeing you as someone worthy enough to die for.

What Label Defines You?

Have you ever seen the T.V. show, *The Biggest Loser*? We do not watch a lot of television at our house anymore, but when we did, *The Biggest Loser* was one of the shows we would watch. I always found it fascinating to watch as people's lives were changed before my very eyes.

People would come on the show who were 100-150 pounds overweight. After spending years of their lives being labeled fat, these people made the decision that it was time for a change. Most of them are bound and determined to shed the weight no matter the cost.

Now, if you have ever seen *The Biggest Loser*, you understand the phrase "No matter the cost." The trainers on the show push these people to their breaking points in hopes of

helping them change their lives and their labels.

During the few seasons we watched the show, it was evident most of the contestants really did want to lose the weight. Week after week we would watch as they shed massive amounts of weight. Over the course of the show, some contestants would lose up to 100 or more pounds by the shows end. It was incredible watching people's lives change in such a dramatic way.

One of my favorite parts of the show was the interviews with the contestants. Most were open about their problem with food addiction. In fact, many times the contestants would shed tears as they talked about their weight struggle. Although they all ended up overweight for different reasons, they all had

one thing in common by the end of the show; pure joy about the weight they lost.

It never failed, with tears in their eyes contestant after contestant would talk about how their weight problem was a thing of the past. Each contest would vow that this was going to be a new chapter in the story of their lives. They were putting the old person behind them and starting over with the new and improved person they had become during their weight loss journey. They were going to be defined by a new label.

We All Have Labels

The more I watched *The Biggest Loser* and heard the interviews with the contestants, the more I saw a spiritual application. No, I am not saying we all need to lose some weight, though

that is something that is important if we are not taking care of our physical bodies. The spiritual application I have seen over and over again is that there comes a point in our lives when we need to take a step back and closely look at what labels define who we are.

As I am sure you are aware, we all wear some kind of label. For most of us we probably wear a whole different variety of labels. Sometimes those labels are good and sometimes those labels are not so good. What is important is we take time to examine what labels define us and make any necessary changes so our labels do not become a hindrance, but a help in our daily walk with God.

Removing Sinful Labels

In Titus 3, we find Paul writing to remind Titus that even people as wicked as the Cretan people, could be transformed (see Titus 1:12). It is because of the grace of God even the wicked can rid their lives of sinful labels.

Paul wrote, “For we ourselves were once foolish, disobedient, led astray, slaves to various passions and pleasures, passing our days in malice and envy, hated by others and hating one another. **4** But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, **5** he saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit, **6** whom he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, **7** so that being justified by his grace we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life” (**Titus 3:3-7**).

For We Ourselves Were Once...

If Titus was going to be fruitful during his ministry in Crete, he was going to have to learn that there was hope for even such wicked people as the Cretans. In order to help Titus come to this understanding more fully, Paul reminded him that they both had things in their past that they were not proud of. However, it was by the grace of God they had such sinful labels removed. Consider a few of the labels Paul and Titus once wore.

Foolish

Paul reminded Titus they had been foolish in their past (Tit. 3:3). If you remember, Paul went about persecuting Christians if you. You cannot get much more foolish than that. Think back on your own life for a moment. How many foolish things fill your past? How many

times did you say something you knew you should not have said? How many times did you participate in something you knew you should not be participating in? How many times did you simply do something that looking back on it, you realized it was something you should not have done? How many times have we worn the label of foolish?

Disobedient

Out of all the things Paul mentioned in this list, this is one thing we all have in common. Just consider how many times we have been disobedient to our parents or those in authority over us? Furthermore, how many times have we been disobedient to our Heavenly Father? Disobedience to God is simply not doing what it is He has asked us do to in this life (Titus 1:16). If you do not know what He's asked you to do, well...you have probably been

disobedient. How many times have we worn the label disobedient?

Led Astray (Deceived)

The people of Crete may have been led astray by a false religion or false teachers. Maybe that is the case for some of us as well. Perhaps our churches are not following the Biblical pattern God placed in his Word. Maybe the deceit becomes even more personal because we have been led astray by our own lust and desires (James 1:13-15). For a lot of us, we are deceived into believing our desires are worthy of giving into and acting upon. The apostle John wrote, *“Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride in possessions, is not from the Father but is from the world”* (I Jn. 2:15-16). Our desires to be led astray come from our own sinful desires which

are not from God. How many times have we worn the label deceived?

Slaves to Various Passions

Think back to some of the struggles you have had with sin. Would you admit you were a slave to that sin? I had a friend in college who admitted he was a slave to a certain sin. The sin was pornography. He said he had tried for years to rid his life of the sin, but he just could not control the urge. He was a slave and the only way out of the slavery he was in was through much prayer and help from his friends keeping him accountable. Are there sins in your life right now that have control over you? Be honest with yourself. If the answer to this question is yes then you have become a slave. How many times have we worn the label slave to passions and pleasure?

Malicious and Envious

The word malice in this passage means a desire to do harm to others. Have you ever been so jealous of someone else that you wished for bad to fall upon them? Maybe you did not wish for their death, but you wished something bad would happen to them to the point that it would cause them a significant amount of pain. How many times have we worn the label malicious and envious?

Hateful and Hating Others

Our society uses the word hate in every way possible. I hate vegetables. I hate school. I hate running. The list could go on and on. Sadly though, much of the time when we speak of hating, we direct it at some in particular.

As children of God, we should not hate others. John wrote, "If anyone says, 'I love God,' and

hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen" (**I John 4:20**).

As if this were not enough of a reason not to hate, John added, "Everyone who hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him" (**I John 3:15**). Hatred of others will cause a person to be lost. How many times have we worn the label of hatred?

The Heavy Label of Sin

What about you? Do you wear any of these labels? Of course you do! We all do. We have all worn either one or all of these embarrassing labels of sin at some point in our lives.

The label of sin is so heavy that it can weigh us down. For some people, it can weigh on them to the point that they just want to give up

thinking there is no hope. They become ashamed of their sins. They become ashamed of their failures before God. They become ashamed at the way they have disgraced their savior. They become ashamed because they wear labels of sin.

Hiding the Labels of Sin

The sad reality of all this is that we try to hide our labels of sin. We try to cover up the sin labels we wear because we are so ashamed. We try to pretend as if we do not wear any labels of sin in hopes that no one will see who we really are.

John said, "If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. ⁹ If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. ¹⁰ If we say we have not

sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us" (**I John 1:8-10**).

None of us can claim to have no sin. Both our present and our past are filled with sin. If we say we have no such sin, notice who John says we are deceiving? We are deceiving ourselves. Why does it not say we are deceiving God? Because God already sees our messy lives filled with sin. God knows we sometimes wear labels of sin.

Maybe that is where some of you are at this point in your life. Maybe you need to shed your life of the labels of sin that weigh you down. If this describes you, I have good news for you. Are you ready? You can replace the label of sin you wear with a label far better and one you can be proud to wear.

A New Label to Wear

God loved you and me so much He was willing to save us and offer us freedom from our labels of sin. This freedom is found through Jesus Christ our savior. It is not by any righteous deeds we have done or will do; it is only through the grace, mercy and love of God (Titus 3:4-7).

We could spend our entire lives trying to impress God with our good lives and our good deeds, and it still would never be good enough to deserve what He has done for us. God has made a way for us to get rid of the labels of sin in our lives. He has provided a way for us to wear new labels of which we can be proud.

John said, "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us of our sins and to cleanse us of all unrighteousness" (I John 1:9).

Why not do that today? The Lord wants to take your sinful label and replace it with the label of forgiven. His nail pierced hands are open wide for you to place your labels on. He wants you to give it all to Him.

You can do that by becoming a Christian if you are not one already. Paul said, "And now why do you wait? Rise and be baptized and wash away your sins, calling on his name" (Acts 22:16). He is really saying, "Rise be baptized and get rid of the sinful labels you have been carrying around."

You can do that right now if you chose. Do not delay. Allow God to wipe your life clean of sinful labels.

Perhaps you are already a Christian but over time the sinful labels you once wore have made their way back into your life. You can go to the Father and drop your labels in his arms.

Remember the words of John: “If we confess our sins...”

Maybe you need to confess to God the labels you have been carrying around. If we will confess, He will forgive (I John 1:9). God will replace your labels of sin with the label of forgiven if you confess your sins to Him. Why not do that now?

Friends, it is time we put off the old person with the sinful labels we have been carrying around and take hold of the new label God is offering us; the label of forgiven!

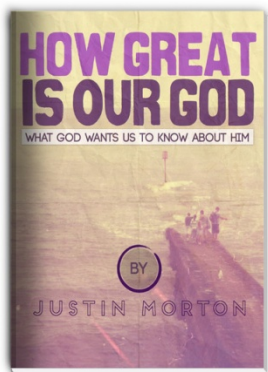
Forgiven is a label we can proudly wear!

CHALLENGE:

Write down all the sinful labels you are currently wearing. Next to each one, write down the reasons why you think you struggle

with that particular label. Spend some time in prayer asking God to forgive you for wearing these sinful labels and ask Him to help you as you strive to walk in the footsteps of His beloved son.

Other Works Available By Justin Morton



7 Week Teaching Series – Packed with illustrations, discussion questions, and a weekly faith building experience.

In this seven week teaching series, your students will grapple with the greatness of God. Most “churched” students come to worship on a weekly basis. They attend youth group, youth rallies and retreats. They sit through countless Bible classes and sermons. By all appearances, they may even seem to have it all together. Sadly though, many

students don't really know who God is, or the excellency of what Christ has done. This series is designed to help students gain a better understanding of the God they worship. This series examines six different promises of God, and what He wants His people to know about Him.

When the series is finished, your students will truly be able to say, "How Great is Our God!"

Lesson 1 – I Can Handle Your Doubts

Lesson 2 – I Have Big Plans for You

Lesson 3 – I Won't Ever Abandon You

Lesson 4 – I Will Forgive You

Lesson 5 – I Don't Send People To Hell

Lesson 6 – I Want You!

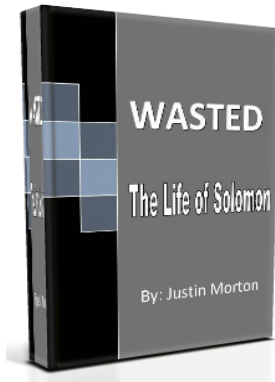
Lesson 7 – Telling Others of God's Greatness



New Teen Booklet Great for a Bible class setting. Includes teacher outlines!

Death's dark shadow has fallen across every doorstep. Whether it is the loss of a parent, grandparent, friend or church member, the resulting sense of despair has made its way into the lives of all people, including teens. Death causes us to feel hurt, angry, betrayed, lonely and afraid. The problem is that many people do not know how to deal with death or how to help a friend who has been touched by a loss.

In *Help! Someone I Love Has Died!* you will experience Scripture in a way that helps you learn how to better deal with the pain of losing someone you love, and also how to help others who have experienced a loss by following the most compassionate example ever: Jesus.



What if God told you to ask anything you wished, what would you wish for? What if you were blessed by God with an amazing amount of potential to change the world, would you use that potential for good? Solomon was one of the few people who was uniquely offered anything he wished from the hand of God. What at first looked to be the potential for an amazing life of influence, turned out to be a life wasted. This six part series is a study devoted to the life of Solomon.

Lesson 1 - Solomon's Great Beginning

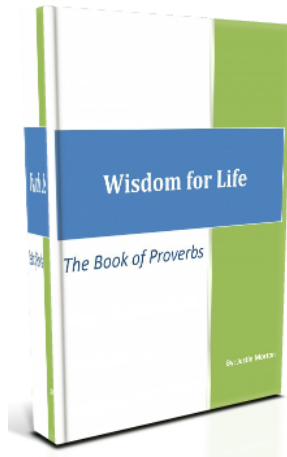
Lesson 2 – Solomon Stopped Growing

Lesson 3- Solomon Failed to Guard His Life

Lesson 4 – Solomon’s Strength Became His Weakness

Lesson 5 – Solomon’s Possessions Possessed Him

Lesson 6 – Solomon’s Regretful Life



Solomon was blessed by God with unmatched wisdom. The book of Proverbs showcases this wisdom with many valuable lessons. In this study students will examine the many words of wisdom Solomon penned long ago that still provide lasting lessons for us today.

Lesson 1: Stop and Listen! Dealing with Correction

Lesson 2: Get a Hold of Yourself! Dealing with Anger

Lesson 3: Choose Your Friends Carefully!

Dealing with Friendships

Lesson 4: Oh, be Careful Little Mouth What

You Say! Dealing with our Words

Lesson 5: Protect Yourself! Dealing with our

Reputation

Lesson 6: Avoid the Trap! Dealing with Sexual

Temptation

Lesson 7: Get a Move on It! Dealing with

Laziness

Lesson 8: Treat them Right! Dealing with our

Enemies

Lesson 9: Show Some Respect! Dealing with

Parents

Lesson 10: Riches Don't Last Forever! Dealing

with Money and Wealth

Lesson 11: Think It Through! Dealing with

Decision Making

Lesson 12: The Heart of the Matter! Dealing
with our Hearts

**Visit Something-To-Think-About.com for
more information about each of these
available resources.**