

LABELS:

Seeing As God Sees

By Justin Morton

“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 school alone because their label is different. People sit at home by themselves when everyone else is going to a birthday party because their label is different.

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?

Just the other day, 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 that 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’s 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 don’t 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 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 saw past a person's label!

Jesus Heals a Leper (*LUKE 5:12-13*)

Lepers lived a miserable life. If a person had leprosy, the priest would pronounce him unclean and they would be banished from their homes, and placed in what was known as a leper colony, forever unable to have normal human contact again, because leprosy was so contagious.

If they were 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. No one would touch them including their family. Imagine never being able to hug your loved ones again. That's a miserable life isn't it?

Leprosy was a label you didn't want. If you had such a label, people purposely avoided you. Everyone that is, except Jesus. You see, Jesus didn't have to touch this leper to heal him. He only had to speak the words of healing, but Jesus stretched out his hand and touched him. Why would Jesus touch someone like a leper? Why would Jesus take time for one many 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 and the Sinful Woman (*LUKE 7:36-39*)

Jesus was dining with a Pharisee, a religious leader in the first century. While they were sitting at the table, this woman from the city comes in the house uninvited, falls down at the feet of Jesus, and begins washing them.

The Pharisee who owned the home was thinking to himself, if Jesus were really a prophet, he would know what sort of person **THIS WOMAN** is, that she is a sinner. The phrase, “**THIS WOMAN**” gives us some indication as to what type of sinner she was. She was believed to be a prostitute.

Labels can’t 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 about her. I image this woman didn’t have a lot of friends because no one would want to be seen with her.

But Jesus was different. He forgave the woman of her sins. She had probably never experienced such grace and mercy and acceptance in her life. But Jesus was able to see past her label.

Jesus and Zacchaeus (*LUKE 19:1-10*)

Zacchaeus was a chief tax collector meaning he probably was in charge of a district and had tax collectors working under him. He was important in the tax collecting field. There’s just one 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 didn't have many friends. He might have been rich, but he had very few people to share it with. Notice, when Jesus entered Jericho, Zaccheus was alone. He climbed up a tree to see Jesus because he was alone. It appears he had no one there with him who could help him.

But Jesus was different! Jesus wanted to go to his house and spend time with this man who had a label most people couldn't see past. Zacchaeus was going to hang with the person everyone came to see on this day. The reason why? Because Jesus saw past the label.

In all three of these cases, Jesus was able to see past the label everyone else saw, and see people for who they really were.

The Importance of Seeing past a Person's Label

Do you think Jesus, seeing past the labels and treating these individuals differently than everyone else had treated them, had a profound impact on the lives of these people? Absolutely! How could their lives not have been affected?

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 were labeled negatively.

GALATIANS 6:10

"So then, as we have opportunity, let us do good to everyone..." (Gal. 6:10). Notice, the three key words in this verse: Opportunity, Good and Everyone. When we have opportunities to do good, we should no matter who the person is. Notice it doesn't say do good to...your friend, your teammate, the good looking kid, the funny guy, the popular student, the girl with all the friends, etc. It says do good go EVERYONE! This includes those who might not have the best label. See past the label!

I want to place a challenge before you. It's 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 youth group who has a label that affects their life in a negative way. My challenge to you is for you to think of ways you can reach out to this person who may not have many friends or much of a social life. 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." (Jn. 15:12)

"Love your neighbor as yourself" (Matt. 22:39)

Seeing YOU as God Sees YOU

Christian Constantine was born like everyone else. He was born to parents who loved and cherished him. The only difference between Christian and you, and it's a big difference, is that Christian was born with severe facial deformities.

His deformities were so severe the doctors were unsure whether or not he would survive. They were working with something they were unsure of. There have only been three similar cases to Christian's in the world.

Christian's condition was so severe and unnatural the doctors waited 3 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.

Today, Christian is grown. 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.

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 appearance (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, etc.)? We've all been there before. We've all felt as if our looks weren't good enough.

If we haven't felt as if we have some physical deformities, we've probably felt we've had some spiritual deformities, right (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, etc.)?

We all wished we looked better, talked cooler, acted differently and were 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're nothing more than junk. 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, YOU 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?"* (Matt. 6:26). The context behind what Jesus was saying is the idea of worrying and how we shouldn't worry because if God takes care of the birds of the air, HE's going to take care of us because we are of more value to Him than the birds of the air.

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.

We were 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"* (Gen. 1:26-27).

Being made in God's image makes us the highest of God's creatures. Consider what separates us from the rest of creation:

- 1) We are capable of speaking.
- 2) We are capable of writing.
- 3) We have freewill.
- 4) We possess 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. You are special because God created you in HIS very own image.

We Were Worth Dying For.

Since the start of the war in Iraq, we have lost 6,598 men and women in our armed forces. 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. Their love for our country was so great, they were willing to die for it. For our brave men and women, America is special enough to die for.

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

Can you imagine dying for your enemies? What about for the enemies of God? It's hard to imagine anyone finding something or someone so valuable and special that they are willing to die for that cause.

But for God, you were the cause worth dying for. *"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"* (Rom. 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. It doesn't get more special than that. When God looks at us 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 sitting here tonight and you have a hard time seeing yourself as someone of value. You have a hard time imagining someone thinking you are special and valuable. When you look in the mirror, you don't see a work of art...you see a shameful sinner of no value to anyone, including God.

You use the excuse, I'm a sinner and I can never change. I have anger, lust, and pride. I'm 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 tonight? God doesn't see you the way you see yourself when you look in the mirror. God sees you as His work of art, as His MASTERPIECE.

I don't know about you, but I'm tired of seeing myself through my own eyes. God didn't create junk. I'm 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?

“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).

You are God’s MASTERPIECE! Now start living like it!



What Label Defines You?

Have you ever seen the T.V. show, *The Biggest Loser*? We don't 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 being 100-150 pounds overweight. After spending years being labeled fat/obese, they made the decision it was time for a change no matter what; and if you've seen *The Biggest Loser* you understand the phrase no matter what. The trainers push these people to their breaking points, in hopes of helping them change their lives and their label.

During the few seasons we watched the show it was evident most of the contestants really wanted to lose weight. Week after week, we watched as they shed massive amounts of pounds. 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 obesity. In fact, many times they would shed tears as they talked about their weight struggles. Although they all ended up overweight for different reasons, they all had one thing in common. It was the feeling they had after they had shed their weight.

It never failed, with tears in their eyes, contestant after contestant would talk about how their weight problems were a thing of the past and how this was the beginning of a new life. They were putting the old person behind them and starting over with the new and improved person they had become. They were going to be defined by a new label.

The more I watched *The Biggest Loser* and heard the interviews with the contestants, the more I saw a spiritual application. No, I'm not saying we all need to lose some weight. The spiritual application I have seen over and over again is there comes a point in our lives when we need to take a close look at what labels define us and see if we need to make a change so our label changes as well.

Off with the Old and On with the New!

This whole weekend has been about LABELS and how God sees us. This morning I want to challenge each of us to look at what label defines us? Do we wear the label of sin or the new label God is offering us?

Read TITUS 3:3-7 – Paul was writing this to remind Titus that even people as wicked as the Cretan people, could be transformed. It is because of the grace of God even the wicked can rid their lives of sinful labels.

For we ourselves were once...

Paul and Titus had things in their past they wished they could have changed.

- 1) **Foolish.** Paul reminds Titus that they had been foolish in their past. Paul went about persecuting Christians. You can't get much more foolish than that. Think back on your own life. How many foolish things fill your past? How many times did you say something you knew you shouldn't have said? How many times did you participate in something you knew you shouldn't be participating in? How many times have you worn the label foolish?
 - 2) **Disobedient.** This is one thing we all have in common. How many times have you been disobedient to your parents in the last week? How many times have you been disobedient to your school teachers? How many times have you been disobedient to God? Disobedience to God is simply not doing what it is He has asked you do to and if you don't know what He's asked you do,
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well...you've been disobedient. How many times have you worn the label disobedient?

3) Led Astray (Deceived). The people of Crete might have been led astray by a false system of religion. For most of us this morning, it's more about being led astray by our own lust and desires. We are deceived into believing our desires are worthy of giving into and acting upon. John wrote, *"Love not the world, neither the things that are 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 lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life, is not from the Father, but is from the world"* (1 Jn. 2:15-16). How many times have you worn the label deceived?

4) Slaves to Various Passions/Pleasures. Think back to some of the struggles you've 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 couldn't. 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 you are a slave to? How many times have you worn the label slave to passions and pleasure?

5) Malicious and Envious. Malice here has special connotation of ill-will and malignity. Such malice is a desire to do harm to others. Have you ever been so jealous of someone that you wished bad upon them? Maybe you didn't wish death, but you wished something bad would happen to them? (EX: they get hurt, fail a test, they get dumped). We've probably all been down this road before. How many times have you worn the label malicious and envious?

6) 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: (EX: I hate him or I hate her). As children of God, we shouldn't 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 Jn. 4:20). *"Everyone who hates his brother is a murderer, and you know no murderer has eternal life abiding in him"* (I Jn. 3:15). Hatred of others will cause a person to be lost. How many times have you worn the label of hatred?

The Label of Sin is Heavy

What about you? Do you wear any of these labels? Of course you do! We all do. We've all worn the embarrassing label of sin at some point. We've all gone through life piling up our own sinful labels.

The label of sin weighs us down. It weighs on us to the point some people give up, thinking there is no hope. We are ashamed of our sins. We are ashamed of our failures before God. We are ashamed at the way we have disgraced our savior. We are ashamed because we wear labels of sin.

Hiding the Label of Sin

The sad reality is we try to hide our labels of sin. We try to cover up the sin label we wear. We try to pretend as if we don't have any labels of sin.

John said, *"If we claim we have no sin, we are only fooling ourselves and not living in the truth."*⁹ *But if we confess our sins to him, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all wickedness."*¹⁰ *If we claim we have not sinned, we are calling God a liar and showing that his word has no place in our hearts"* (I Jn. 1:8-10).

We can't claim to have no sin. Both our present and our past is filled with sin. If we say we have no such sin, who does it say we are deceiving? Notice, we are deceiving

OURSELVES. Why doesn't it 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's where some of you are today. Maybe today, you need to shed your life of the labels of sin that weighs you down. If this describes you, I have good news for you, you can replace the label of sin you wear with a label far better.

Through God's Kindness and Love We Can Wear A New Label

God loved you so much he was willing to save you and offer you freedom from your labels of sin through Jesus Christ our savior. It's not by any righteous deeds we've done; it's through the grace of God. We could spend our entire lives trying to impress God with our good lives and our good deeds, and it still wouldn't be good enough to deserve what God has done for us. God has made a way for us to get rid of the labels of sin in our lives.

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 Jn. 1:9). Why not do that today.

The Lord wants to take your sinful label and replace it with the label 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, *"Arise, be baptized and wash away your sins"* (Acts 22:16). He really saying, "Arise, be baptized and get rid of the sinful labels you have been carrying around."

You can do that today. But if you are already a Christian but somehow the labels have come back over time, you can go to the Father and drop your labels in his arms. John said, *"If we confess our sins..."* maybe you need to do that today; maybe today you need to confess the labels you have been carrying around. *"He is faithful and just to forgive us of our sins and to cleanse us of all unrighteousness"* (I Jn. 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 today.

Guys, it's time we put off the old person with the sinful labels we carry around, and take hold of the new label God is offering us, the label of forgiven!

PRAYER: *God, this morning we pray that you help us see the sinful labels in our lives that comes with our old sinful self and that you will help us come to terms with the fact that this is not who you intended for us to be. Help us see that YOU have given us a way to put our old labels behind us and to wear a new label, the label of FORGIVEN. In Jesus' name, AMEN!*

