

213. Labels

By Arland Steen

Acts 17:28 (New King James): *for in Him we live and move and have our being*

Have you ever been struck by how many conversations revolve around our labels? "I'm ADD." "I'm OCD." "I'm manic depressive." "I'm disabled." "I'm diabetic." "I'm alcoholic." "I'm an addict." The list goes on and on.

We use labels as if they clarify who we are, maybe even our most defining marks. We use these descriptions as a way of helping people keep their expectations of us in order. The problem is, when we use one of these labels to describe ourselves, they often give us our deepest sense of identity. We believe the lie that the label defines us. We shift from believing a particular label is something we face to believing it's someone we are.

Labels are powerful things we can misconstrue as our identities. But what if we came to understand that labels don't define us? That, instead, they are an explanation to help the world understand things we've dealt with or come up against?

When we don't view our identity through a label, we're able to find ways to thrive in spite of whatever label we are living under. This mindset helps us turn from despair to hope.

Rebekah Lyons is an example. She is a national speaker and author. A number of years ago she faced panic attacks. She didn't know what was happening to her. In looking back she says that was a good thing because it kept her from labeling herself causing her to think she had to live that way.

Instead, she tried new approaches to overcome her fear of being trapped in tight spaces. Each day she prayed for peace and courage and then tried to push through her claustrophobia via exposure. She continued to approach subways, elevators and crowds, scary as it was. Some days she was successful and some days she wasn't. But she says the game-changer was learning who Christ really made her to be and discovering her true identity.

Over time the small spaces lost their scariness. She didn't hesitate to hop on an elevator or a train. And although her panic attacks began many years earlier on an airplane, she now hops on an airplane on many Fridays in order to share her testimony around the country. She says the irony is not lost on her. Her pain became her purpose.

She used a figure that stated 76% of the population believe we best "define ourselves" by looking within. That is, if we stare deep into our psyche and evaluate our feelings, personalities, passions, desires and even addictions long enough, we will discover our true selves.

But looking only at ourselves can bring disillusionment and lead us to an empty place. Why?

Because though our internal realities are true, they don't define us. They don't show us who we really are. Staring into a mirror might show us what we look like in the moment, but it cannot show us who we are or where we're going.

So, how do we find our true identity, who we are and where we're going?

The Bible leads us beyond the trappings of ourselves and into an identity rooted in something more solid, more immovable – God Himself.

1 Corinthians 1:30 (New King James): *But of Him you are in Christ Jesus, who became for us wisdom from God – and righteousness and sanctification and redemption.*

(The Passion Translation): *30 For it is not from man that we draw our life but from God as we are being joined to Jesus, the Anointed One. And now he is our God-given wisdom, our virtue, our holiness, and our redemption.*

(J.B. Phillips): *Yet from this same God you have received your standing in Jesus Christ, and he has become for us the true wisdom, a matter, in practice, of being made righteous and holy, in fact, of being redeemed.*

(Amplified Bible): *30 But it is from Him that you have your life in Christ Jesus, Whom God made our Wisdom from God, [revealed to us a knowledge of the divine plan of salvation previously hidden, manifesting itself as] our Righteousness [thus making us upright and putting us in right standing with God], and our Consecration [making us pure and holy], and our Redemption [providing our ransom from eternal penalty for sin].*

Identity in Him is trustworthy and unchanging.

When our identity is found in who God says we are rather than in our highs and lows, our successes and failures, or our desires, affections or shortcomings, we experience the freedom we were meant to enjoy.

If you have worn your own identity label like a name tag, take time to find out who God says you are in Him.

Root yourself deep in that identity.

You do this by meditating scriptures that tell you who you are and what you have in Christ.

Then, with an identity rooted in the God who gives wisdom, strength and love, go out into the world secure and confident in who you really are.