

## LOOKING AT THE LABELS

I heard a story recently about how rude a customer was to an employee who was still being trained at a store. When the customer expressed what she needed, this new employee tried to be of assistance but quickly realized they had not been trained yet on that matter. The customer was clearly irritated and told the employee she was incompetent. The employee called her manager for assistance but when he arrived, he did not know how to properly handle the customer's need either. At that moment the customer turned to the manager and employee in training and said, "I will come back when there is not incompetent staff and managers on!" After saying this, the customer abruptly turned around and left.

When I heard this story, it made me wonder if this customer is aware of the labels she is placing on others with her words. When we think of labels, we usually consider the labels that are already on items we are looking at buying. For instance, at the grocery store I will often look at the label on say a loaf of bread, or on a milk carton to see the expiry date before putting it in my cart. Sometimes when I purchase a new item at the grocery store, I will look at the label first to see if it has instructions on how best to prepare it for serving. When it comes to clothing, I look at the labels in order to find the proper size for me. With medications I look at the labels to see how often it should be taken, or what might be possible side effects to look for. Of course, when I see a warning label on some products, I will pay even closer attention to see what it says.

With all these things I have described others have affixed the labels to these products. In the situation I described at the store, the customer was placing a label on the employee in training along with the manager on duty. Sadly, some words that are spoken to us can be like labels placed on us that can be detrimental to our self worth. As much as we would like to quickly remove that label placed on us through somebody else's words, it is not always easy to do. I had a hockey coach long ago that often placed labels on me whenever he felt I was not playing well. It took me many years to remove the harmful labels he placed on me.

It is important for us to look at examples from everyday life like what happened at that store recently to ask ourselves whether we might be doing the same thing and affixing labels to people by the words we express. The Bible speaks a

lot about the great care and consideration we must use when it comes to the words that we speak. For instance, in **James 3:9-10** he speaks about the difficulty we will have in controlling our tongue:

***Sometimes it praises our Lord and Father, and sometimes it curses those who have been made in the image of God. And so blessing and cursing come pouring out of the same mouth.***

Scripture goes on to explain the words being spoken by us are not only a reflection of whether we are able to control our tongue but also of attitudes going on in our hearts. Jesus taught about this when He said in **Luke 6:45**:

***What you say flows from what is in your heart.***

Our heart can be a label-maker so to speak. It has the ability to put labels of encouragement or discouragement upon others depending on what we are saying. It is so important that we pay close attention to the words we are speaking to others in order to make sure our hearts are not affixing negative labels on them. It is our calling as believers to encourage and lift others up rather than tear them down with our labels and words.

About an hour after this woman left the store an elderly couple approached this same employee for assistance. They were patient and kind with the employee in training. The employee received a high-five from them afterward as an expression for a job well-done. The high-five may not have been a label, but it left a more positive effect than the words spoken by the customer an hour earlier. I hope this can be a lesson from everyday life that will inspire us to be encouragers.

**Keep safe and God bless,**

**Pastor Dean**