

I. Introduction

- A. Welcome to week 6 in our series called Bite Me. We're learning to bite our tongues because, if you tame your tongue, you will heal your heart. Are you enjoying this series? Have you been convicted by this series? Are you going broke through this series?
- B. Today, I want to talk about "labels." Labeling is a big deal to me. For Christmas, my wife bought me a P-Touch label maker. I love it. I'd label everything in our house if Margi would let me. I've got shelves in my closets, and they're all labeled, and I can find stuff. We have bins with labels on them. My kids get into the action; we just put P-touch labels on the tabs in my daughter's binder for school. Labeling is a big deal.
- C. When God created Adam, He told him to label all the animals. Adam became the first taxonomist—taxonomy is the systematic classification of organisms.
- D. That labeling was a smaller part of a bigger job. Because God also told Adam and Eve to exercise dominion over all the animals (Gen 1:26, 28). When you get to label something, it's because you own it. I go around labeling my own stuff; but how weird would it be if I came to your house, and started labeling your stuff? Started naming it? Started exercising dominion over it?
- E. Labels are a big deal.
- F. Has anyone ever stuck a label on you?
 - 1. You're stupid; you'll never amount to anything.
 - 2. You're ugly; I can't stand looking at you.
 - 3. You're evil, the devil owns you.
 - 4. You're worthless; nobody can ever love a person like you.
- G. Those labels are tough. Other labels, maybe, don't seem so tough, but I think they can still do some damage. Here's one I hear all the time, and I'm going to step on toes, but that's my spiritual gift:
 - 1. How many times have you heard a parent—and I know this is innocent, but let me be ultra-sensitive to this, please—how many times have you heard a parent say, this is my child, and he is SHY. You put the "shy" label on your kid. You call your kid shy, and your kid's gonna act shy.
 - 2. I don't like labels. I hear it all the time, someone calls a child short, or tall, or skinny, or "husky" which is code for fat—in earshot of the child. NO KID WANTS A LABEL. No kid wants to stick out or be anything other than a normal kid. Leave them be.
- H. Why? Because labels are powerful. They don't just DESCRIBE behavior, labels DEFINE behavior too. Keep telling your son he's a troublemaker, and all you'll get is trouble.

II. The Two Most Important Labels

- A. There are two labels that define your whole life. I'd say you can trace every bit of dysfunctionality and every bit of functionality in your life back to these two labels.
- B. Want to know what they are?
- C. How you label God.
- D. How you label yourself.
- E. Those two labels become self-fulfilling prophecies. You will live up to the label you put on yourself. And God will live up—in your life—to the label you put on Him.
- F. So, here is our case study on the two most important labels in your life.

III. Moses, God, and the Burning Bush

- A. *"One day Moses was tending the flock of his father-in-law, Jethro, the priest of Midian, and he went deep into the wilderness near Sinai, the mountain of God. Suddenly, the angel of the LORD appeared to him as a blazing fire in a bush. Moses was amazed because the bush was engulfed in flames, but it didn't burn up. 'Amazing!' Moses said to himself. 'Why isn't that bush burning up? I must go over to see this.' When the LORD saw that He had caught Moses' attention, God called to him from the bush, 'Moses! Moses!' 'Here I am!' Moses replied"* Exodus 3:1-4, NLT.
 - 1. Here's a trick question: what name did Moses' mother give him? Answer: Moses was not named by his mother. He was named by the daughter of the Egyptian Pharaoh. The Egyptians were slaughtering the male Jewish babies, and the only way Moses survived was that his mother gave him up to the Egyptians. Moses is Hebrew, and it probably means "drawn out" of the water.
 - 2. The first label ever put on Moses was put on him by his stepmother—Drawn Out from the River.
 - 3. But you know what is really cool? The only recorded statement about his birth mother's opinion is this: "she saw that he was good" (Ex 2:2). I love that.
 - 4. But think of Moses, growing up, labeled by someone who didn't know him, and didn't love him with a mother's heart.
 - 5. So Moses sees a burning bush, and God speaks to him, and calls his name. And Moses draws near.
- B. *"Do not come any closer," God told him. "Take off your sandals, for you are standing on holy ground." Then He said, "I am the God of your ancestors—the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob." When Moses heard this, he hid his face in his hands because he was afraid to look at God"* Exodus 3:5, 6, NLT.
 - 1. Holy ground. Not just because God is there. God is omnipresent—all of God is in all of space at all of time. But there are times when God makes His presence specially known. And that makes this place holy ground.
 - 2. But there's more to it, because there other times God met people in a special way, and He let them keep their shoes on.
 - 3. I think there's something really cool about what is going to happen in Moses' life, so God wants to make it memorable.

4. Have you ever had God do something special in your life, and He makes it memorable? I think that's what's going on here.
 5. God is going to relabel the two most important people in Moses' life. He's going to relabel Himself, and He's going to relabel Moses.
 6. Every time you get a fresh vision of God as He really is, and it shatters your previous vision of God, that is holy ground. That is a sacred moment. You are standing on holy ground.
 7. And...
 8. Every time you get a fresh vision of yourself as God sees you, that's holy ground too. That is a sacred moment. And I pray that today, in this worship time, that makes this auditorium sacred ground for you, and you see Him and yourself in a new light—a true light.
 9. So Moses crashes to earth. He hides his face in his hands and is afraid to look at God.
- C. *“Then the LORD told him, ‘You can be sure I have seen the misery of my people in Egypt. I have heard their cries for deliverance from their harsh slave drivers. Yes, I am aware of their suffering. So I have come to rescue them from the Egyptians and lead them out of Egypt into their own good and spacious land. It is a land flowing with milk and honey—[the land where the Canaanites, Hittites, Amorites, Perizzites, Hivites, and Jebusites live.] The cries of the people of Israel have reached me, and I have seen how the Egyptians have oppressed them with heavy tasks. Now go, for I am sending you to Pharaoh. You will lead my people, the Israelites, out of Egypt.’”* Exodus 3:7-10, NLT.
1. How incredible is this! Moses was in hiding for 40 years, flying under the Pharaoh's radar, keeping a low profile. Existing, but not really living.
 2. DO you know anybody like that? Great potential? Forty years of great potential never acted on?
 3. Now's the time, God calls to him, just like He calls to you. I have a great mission for you. I have a calling on your life, God says. I have something for you to live for, and something for you to die for. I have something worth striving, straining, and giving your all for. I am sending YOU, God says, to lead My People out of slavery and into freedom. Out of slavery to sin and into the glorious liberty of the children of God.
 4. Neighborhood Church talks a lot about the Great Commission. Jesus told us, *“Go into all the world and make disciples of every person”* (Mark 16:15). That's our Prime Directive, but I wonder if you feel it. Is it this abstract idea that Christ-followers are supposed to do this thing called “evangelism?” Or is it a fire in your belly that if you don't give your life to the cause of world evangelism, everything is wasted.
 5. See, God got in Moses' face, and said, Moses, I'm talking to you. Here is your personal call, your reason for being on earth. I have a mission just for you. There is something you are uniquely gifted to do. No one can do this the way you can do this. I want you. Your whole life has been a preparation for this mission—even the bad stuff, even the tragedy of losing your identity and family. Life is school, and now you're graduating, and God has a calling on your life.
 6. Go, set my people free.
 7. Remember how Moses responds? He pulls out his P-Touch label maker and labels himself INADEQUATE.
 8. [I'm collecting all of Moses' objections in one place so you can see what's happening...]
- D. *“But who am I to appear before Pharaoh?” Moses asked God. ‘How can You expect me to lead the Israelites out of Egypt?’”* Exodus 3:11, NLT.
- E. *“But Moses protested again, ‘Look, they won't believe me! They won't do what I tell them. They'll just say, ‘The LORD never appeared to you.’”* Exodus 4:1, NLT.
- F. *“But Moses pleaded with the LORD, ‘O Lord, I'm just not a good speaker. I never have been, and I'm not now, even after you have spoken to me. I'm clumsy with words.’”* Exodus 4:10, NLT.
- G. *“But Moses again pleaded, ‘Lord, please! Send someone else.’”* Exodus 4:13, NLT.
1. See why labels are so important?
 2. God says I have called you to set my people free.
 3. And Moses says—well look at it yourself—what word starts each verse here on the screens?
 4. But, but, but, but. Four times, in this very long chapter, Moses slaps a big label over his forehead, and it says, Inadequate. Unworthy. Too Weak. Too Stupid. Too Stuttering. Too Damaged.
 5. Question: whose voice is Moses listening to, God's voice, or the voice of his past?
 6. Question: whose voice are you listening to—when it comes to how you see yourself, believe in yourself, and rise up to your high calling in Christ Jesus?
 7. Labels
 8. Can you remember a time when someone labeled you? Do you have your own label story? You might get lost in your story. Can you see how so much of your life has been a reaction to someone else's label on you?
 9. I have four labels from my past that haunt me:
 - a) Shy, Stupid, Fat, and Unwanted.
 10. Now, I'm not going to tell all these stories, because this isn't the place, but let me tell you one.
 11. I was in 2nd grade. The cutest girl in our school was named Pam. I had a crush on Pam. All the boys had a crush on Pam.
 12. One day, we were in the hallway at Oriole Park School in Chicago. It was close to the end of the school day, and I was standing sideways to Pam, who was a few lockers down from my locker. She was with a friend and Pam looked at me, and saw my little belly hanging out and she turned to her friend, and whispered—and she didn't know that I heard it—she whispered, “Bill is fat.”

13. Bam! A Label! A BIG LABEL from an important person! And it stuck like it had crazy glue. I was crushed, but even worse, in my mind, I accepted the label and said to myself: you're fat. And what's so weird, is that even into my 20's when I was thin, fit, athletic, and working out—in my head, I owned the label: you're fat. I always thought I was fat. And then one day, I saw a picture of myself, and I looked really good, thin, and fit—and I remember being confused, because I thought I was fat—and I know psychiatrists have a name for this, but it doesn't matter.
14. What matters is that I had a struggle I couldn't shake, and it has lasted all my life and it's because of an important person slapping a label on me at a vulnerable time.
15. How about you?
16. The crazy thing is that label became my mental reality, even when my real reality was different.
17. How about you? What label got slapped on you by an important person at a vulnerable time?
 - a) You're dumb. You're fat. You're tall. You're skinny. You're gay. You're lazy. You're crazy. You're nobody. You're nothing to me. You stutter. You're my toy, my plaything. You limp. You can't see right. You can't hear right. You can't walk right, talk right, and think right.
18. What is it? What label owns you?
19. Because the biggest problem is your label sends you for forty years—or a whole lifetime—into the wilderness to tend sheep, when God designed you to liberate nations.
20. One day, God will come to you—in a burning bush, a sermon, a conversation, or a dream—I don't know what your sacred moment will look like, but maybe it looks like me talking to you right now.
21. God invites you out of the labels that other people have put on you, and into the label He put on you.
22. And what do you say?
23. "Who am I? How can you expect me? They won't believe me! They won't do what I tell them! I'm not a good speaker! Lord, please send someone else."
24. There are two huge problems with negative labels:
 - a) God designed you to SOAR, but negative labels make you limp. They're like an anchor and you know there's this voice from God's Spirit, whispering deep inside you saying, "You were made for more than this." But then the label pops up and says, "Don't kid yourself." God designed you to soar, but your labels make you limp.
 - b) But that's not all they do.
 - c) Negative labels make you relabel God. He's an ogre. He's an abandoning father. He may be smart, He may be powerful, but He's heartless. Or He's weak—He's as impotent as the father who labeled me.
25. Moses is so messed up; he doesn't even know what to call God. He was born a Jew, but grew up Egyptian, and now he lives in Midian and God seems lost to him. He asks the question that every one of us asks one way or another:

H. *"But Moses protested, 'If I go to the people of Israel and tell them, 'The God of your ancestors has sent me to you,' they won't believe me. They will ask, 'Which god are you talking about? What is his name?'* Then what should I tell them?" *God replied, 'I AM THE ONE WHO ALWAYS IS. Just tell them, 'I AM has sent me to you.'"* God also said, *"Tell them, 'The LORD, the God of your ancestors—the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob—has sent me to you. This will be My name forever; it has always been My name, and it will be used throughout all generations.'"* Exodus 3:13-15, NLT.

 1. What is God doing? He's helping Moses by putting the correct label on Himself. Because the two most important labels in your life are 1) the label you put on God, and 2) the label you put on yourself.
 2. Who is God? His name is I AM. He's the only one who can say that. He just IS. He is the Uncaused Cause. He is the self-existent, non-contingent reality. We exist because an outside being named God wills us into existence, and continually wills our existence.
 3. But God exists simply because God exists, and He requires no outside being to keep Him going. I AM WHO I AM—I AM. The Hebrew name for God, Yahweh, or Jehovah, comes from this kind of language. God is the Great I AM.
 4. And that is why we worship God, and sing praise to His name, so that we can put the correct label on Him and not just from the head, but from the heart. From the deepest part of your soul, you begin to see Him as He really is.
 5. God is...
 - a) Jehovah Jireh, the Lord Who provides.
 - b) Jehovah Shamma, the Lord Who is there.
 - c) Jehovah Tsabaoth, the Lord of Hosts.
 - d) Jehovah Rohi, the Lord my Shepherd.
 - e) Jehovah Nissi, the Lord my Banner
 - f) Jehovah Shalom, the Lord our Peace
 - g) Elohim, the Supreme God
 - h) El Olam, the Everlasting God
 - i) El Shaddai, the Almighty God
 - j) El Elyon, the God Most High.
 6. He is...
 - a) SOVEREIGNTY: the caring and powerful ruler of your life and your world.
 - b) HOLINESS: pure, and exalted and separate from evil.
 - c) RIGHTEOUSNESS: fair and true and lives up to His standards.
 - d) LOVE: always willing the best for His creations, and longing to be in relationship with you.
 - e) ETERNAL LIFE: the passing of time puts no limitations on God.

- f) OMNISCIENCE: God knows all the knowable.
 - g) OMNIPRESENCE: All of God fills all of space all the time.
 - h) OMNIPOTENCE: Infinite in power and strength.
 - i) IMMUTABILITY: the same, yesterday, today, and forever. He says, "I am the Lord, I change not."
 - j) TRUTH: the reality against which all other realities are judged.
7. He is the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, the one and only Savior, crucified, risen again.
 8. He is Savior, Sanctifier, Healer, and Coming King.
 9. That's Who God is. That's how I label God. How do you label God? But you say...
 10. So what?
 11. Who cares?
 12. My life's a wreck, and all you can do is talk about God—so what? Who cares? Give me answers for my real life.
 - a) What difference does it make?
 13. It makes all the difference in the world.
 14. Because you can't label yourself right until you label God right. Get it?
 15. Moses asked, "Who am I?" And you ask the same question every time you get in trouble, and every time you run out of money, and every time you fight with your spouse, and every time you break up with your boyfriend or girlfriend. Who am I? You ask that every time you do lousy on a test, and feel lost in algebra class. Who am I? That's what you ask when you lose your home, and your friends, and your love, and your health, and your familiar places.
 16. WHO AM I? What good am I? Who cares? And immediately the evil label maker we call the devil rushes in with a whole list of suggestions. And your peer group adds their suggestions. And the media and TV add their suggestions. And the legalistic religious people add their suggestions. And the voices from your past rise up and add their suggestions.
 17. And pretty soon you're plastered with labels that tell you who you are, a failed, pimple-faced, worthless nobody who just can't live the life you hoped to live deep down inside.
 18. God sent me here seven years ago today to tell you this message: ALL THOSE LABELS ARE LIES.
 19. The ONLY ONE who knows the real you, the deep you, the true you, is GOD. Your Heavenly Father knows who you are, and He calls you by your true name. Not the degrading names others have slapped on you.
 20. But your true, glorious, beautiful, holy, beloved, honorable, valuable, precious, wise, adequate, powerful, intelligent, just-right name.
 21. When you call God by His name, He calls you by your name.
 22. When you label God right, He labels you right, and you finally begin to believe it.

IV. Conclusion

- A. God longs to come to you today, to remove all the other labels, all the other tags, all the other names.
- B. And the Bible tells us how God wants to label you.
 1. *You label yourself a fatherless child, and He labels Himself Father to the fatherless and makes you His child (Psalms 68:5, John 1:12).*
 2. *You label yourself worthless, and He labels you precious (Isaiah 43:4).*
 3. *You label yourself hateful, and He labels you beloved (Eph 1:6).*
 4. *You label yourself stupid and incompetent, and He labels you able to do all things (Phil 4:13).*
 5. *You label yourself fat, or tall, or skinny, or blemished, or ugly, and He labels you GLORIOUS (Col 3:4).*
 6. *You label yourself as lost and forgotten, and He says, "Can a woman forget her nursing child, neither will I forget you—behold, I have engraved you on the palms of my hands" (Isa 49:15, 16).*
 7. *You label yourself a waste of a life, and He labels you an invincible soldier on a mission from heaven (Titus 2:3,4).*
 8. *You say, I can't and God says, "Yes, you can" (2 Cor 9:8).*
- C. Start at the burning bush and fast forward 45 years. Moses has finished his mission. He has brought the people to the Promised Land—twice. And now they will enter, but he won't enter. He won't enter the earthly Promised Land, but it doesn't matter. He enters the heavenly one.
- D. I love how his epic story of Moses ends:
 1. *"There has never been another prophet like Moses, whom the LORD knew face to face. The LORD sent Moses to perform all the miraculous signs and wonders in the land of Egypt against Pharaoh, all his servants, and his entire land. And it was through Moses that the LORD demonstrated His mighty power and terrifying acts in the sight of all Israel"* Deuteronomy 34:10-12, NLT.
- E. Here's a man who knew God, and knew himself. Now, it's your turn.
- F. Who are you?
- G. Who labels you?
- H. What labels do you put on God?
- I. What labels do you put on others?
- J. I've never met a person who doesn't need label rehab. And that's where we'll pick it up next time.