

The Pain Of The Labels They Put On Us!

Written by admin
Tuesday, 10 April 2012 14:48 -

By Mary Isaacs



Recently, I was listening to the radio and heard a Ugandan singer express how much he had resented being called an orphan when he was growing up. You might ask why not, since indeed he was an orphan. His parents had been relatively well off but both had died within a few years of each other. They had contracted HIV/AIDS and the ensuing treatment for the disease had drained most of their resources. The children thereafter became pariahs. They could not get any help from any of the friends of their parents. Soon they were passed around to various relatives who would be sure to always explain to people that they were orphans. He says he lost his identity, becoming “orphan” to all. He was happy that he had now changed his identity to “musician”, something that gave him a positive identity and therefore dignity. Negative labels diminish people’s self esteem.

How often do we give people certain labels such as widows, orphans, single mothers, fatherless, unmarried, fat, disabled, poor, illiterate, and old? You may be surprised that most of these people resent with a passion these labels you give them. They feel stigmatized. Yes, they are all that, but they are much more than that. They may be hard working, intelligent, and capable of milliard things. They do not want to be an object of your pity.

Some disabled people like the blind complain that others do not address them directly. They assume that the blind are hearing impaired or mentally deficient too. They stand by and listen to their aides being asked questions like, “Does he take sugar in his tea?”

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When we put negative labels on people, it makes us feel more significant and self righteous. It sounds like the prayer of the hypocritical Pharisees one of who stood up and prayed about himself: *"God, I thank you that I am not like other men--robbers, evildoers, adulterers--or even like this tax collector"* (Luke 18:11). Clearly, a lot of people feel more superior to others and treat them like they have done something very wrong or sinful that makes them deserve their fate.

Why keep reminding people of their condition? It may have the effect of driving them to self pity. Look for a positive way you can help people who are less endowed than you are while ensuring that they maintain their self esteem.

A certain pastor who is disabled on both legs as a result of childhood polio said that many people in Christian crusades and conferences assume that people like him are in attendance just to be prayed for. Well, he attends them to hear the word of God or to preach. He says that he came to terms with his disability a long time ago. He assures all that he is one hundred percent what God wanted him to be. And indeed he is a very charismatic speaker with a booming voice and people listening to him soon put their full attention on his message and forget his physical condition.

Everybody is fearfully and wonderfully made by God (Psalms 139:14). There is a lot of potential in each one of us which can more than make up for the challenges we have. If we let God reveal his full purpose for our lives, he can also be glorified through our infirmities. Whatever our circumstances, let us look to God, He will sustain us.