

## **REFLECTION: DON'T BOX PEOPLE IN**

**Inspired by Luke 6: 37-42 & Luke 7: 36-50**

Have you ever been part of a group where you had a sense that your acceptance was tentative at best? In some ways, my memories of school are like that. We moved over 20 times during those years, so I was always the new kid, the strange one, the outcast. Being shy, made it difficult for me to make friends.

Most of us tend to “label” people, to judge them just by their appearance. According to Mr. Google – To judge someone means to form an opinion or evaluation about them, usually based on their actions, words, appearance, or other aspects. Judging someone can be positive or negative, depending on whether the judgment is fair, accurate, and constructive or if it is biased, inaccurate, and harmful. Judging someone can also affect how we treat them and how we feel about them.

### **HOW DOES THIS WORK**

After a while being in proximity with someone, we often know who they are. The good and the bad. At least what we like and don't like as much. For those of us who have an unknown spirit within us to label people, our default is often to put people into a box.

Why do we label others? Is it because we fear the unknown? Do we feel insecure? Do we compare ourselves to them? Do we need to feel superior? Are we influenced by our culture and biases?

Whether consciously or not, we judge others all the time. It's human nature to size up people and situations, but is it harmful? Probably, because judging someone affects how we treat them, how we feel about them, and how we perceive ourselves in relation to them. Therefore, judging someone is not a trivial matter but a complex and nuanced process that requires careful consideration and empathy.

At one of our Affirming Circle meetings, Marsha mentioned that as soon as we put a label on someone, we see them differently. We no longer can see them as they were before. Yet, they are still the same person, the same human being.

Essentially, when we label someone, we put a ceiling over the person's growth and potential when we box them in. We mark a line in the sand and say: “We can never cross it because of who I know you to be.”

Who are we to place them in a box? In reality, we know very little about them or how God is working in their lives. By labelling them, are we also putting ourselves in a box? I think so because we are limiting our possibilities of new friendships.

People change. We all do; we are constantly changing. So let's not box people in. Let's grow together.

### **YES, PEOPLE CHANGE**

Are we not more mature, more experienced about life's challenges now than when we were teenagers (now that's a long time ago), or even just a year ago? We've made mistakes, we all do! We need to be careful that we don't judge someone with a benchmark that we would not want our own lives to be judged by. David always said, “When you point the finger you have three fingers coming back at you.”

Does God only choose winners, already successful people? Well polished people, mature people? If we look closely at Jesus' lineage, it seems that it came through the lives of messed up people. Look at the disciples. Did he choose religious leaders or high-status citizens? No, He chose common, uneducated, rough-around-the-edges people.

Do we really think God only works in people like us? Remember Larry King? He was a great TV and radio host known for his straight to the point interviewing technique. He hosted 'Larry King Live' for 25 years. We trusted him. Right! But, if I told you that when he was 38 years old, he was arrested in Miami for grand larceny. Would you still see him the same way? Would his label be the same? Would he remain in the same box you had him

in? Maybe, your trust level just went down a notch or two. But why? He made a mistake; he learnt from it and changed – changed for the better.

### **BY BOXING SOMEONE IN ARE WE REJECTON GOD?**

God can change people. When we put people in a box and never allow them to grow, to change, are we telling God who he can work on or through?

We know what both acceptance and rejection feel like, don't we? Acceptance feels FANTASTIC. I wanted to overcome my shyness and fear of public speaking, so I joined the Christopher Leadership Course in 1995. Christopher Leadership is a program that provides a unique opportunity to develop your leadership style and abilities. It teaches and explores these concepts through the framework of the Gospel message. I passed Level 1 and 2 and, along the way, I learnt not only speaking skills, but I discovered hidden talents. It also helped me increase my confidence and enthusiasm. I will always remember the joy and pride I felt when I was asked to join the team of instructors.

You see, you can only be invited to become an instructor if all four of your instructors agree unanimously that you could make a difference and be part of the team. What a great feeling and privilege. I thought classes for two seasons as part of the team then I was invited to be the Team Leader for the next session.

But what about rejection? Anybody remember what it feels like to be rejected? Rejection feels HORRIBLE. Rejection feels most unwelcome. Were you ever the last one to be chosen to join the team? Remember that letter after an application to university, or to a position that you really wanted that said, "We regret to inform you ..." We didn't need to read the rest. We knew. I got one of those letters after applying to become a flight attendant with Air Canada in my early 20s. It was like being rejected twice because it was so generic, no explanation on the why! It would have been helpful to know so I could improve, grow, and possibly re-apply.

### **JESUS DIDN'T BOX PEOPLE IN**

In today's reading, Jesus did not reject the woman that had been boxed in by the Pharisees. On the contrary he accepted her for who she was – not what she had been "labelled" to be.

The moment we understand that God sees us exactly the way we are, and says, "I am satisfied with you. You are accepted by me," then we have no right to say anything less about ourselves or anyone else. That means that we can accept that although we are one-of-a-kind, we are also all part of a bigger family called "Humanity".

Lily Ebert, a Holocaust survivor, in her book Lily's Promise, says: "It's so important to tell the world what can happen when we are not tolerant of each other. That is the main thing to understand. When somebody is different from you, it doesn't mean they are worse or better. They are only different. If we can understand that, then we can live in peace with one another."

If we can accept the fact that you, like me, are not perfect, that God has us under construction; then, we can understand that we all need acceptance and unconditional love, rather than rejection and being labeled and boxed in.

I'd like to share a 4-minute video with you that really spoke to me. It showed me that we all have the same worries, the same fears, wrongdoings, the same joys and hopes. I hope it speaks to you too. **Play VIDEO**

This video also tells me that God wants us to know that He loves us and accepts us all just the way we are – flaws and all. We don't have to do anything to earn His love except love each other as He loves us. That leads us to the main point of the message today: Let's not box people in – we are all unique, yet part of His big family called "Humanity". Amen.