

REDEFINED

CONFRONTING THE LABELS THAT **LIMIT US**

ARDEN BEVERE

COFOUNDER OF SONS & DAUGHTERS

“Oftentimes, standing between us and our destiny are lies from the enemy about who we are and what we’re capable of. *Redefined* will help you identify those lies and replace them with the truth of who you are in Christ so that you can step fully into all he has destined you to be.”

Christine Caine, bestselling author;
founder, A21 and Propel Women

“I highly recommend reading Arden Bevere’s book *Redefined: Confronting the Labels That Limit Us*. God doesn’t label us; he calls us. This book will help you completely redefine what you have been called to do and who you are called to be.”

Jentezen Franklin, senior pastor, Free Chapel;
New York Times bestselling author

“In every generation God calls new leaders to share his love, power, and truth to those around them. Arden Bevere has answered that call, and in *Redefined: Confronting the Labels That Limit Us*, he extends it to millennials and anyone longing to make a positive difference in our world. Using contemporary examples and the timeless truth of God’s Word, *Redefined* strips away false assumptions and mistaken generalizations and reminds us of our true identities as God’s sons and daughters.”

Chris Hodges, senior pastor, Church of the Highlands;
author of *The Daniel Dilemma* and *What’s Next?*

“Arden, you have stood up and taken notice of the cry of this generation. You are giving them the keys to overcome the labels that have been placed on them to keep them small and keep them from changing their world. We truly believe that this book is a necessary tool that needs to be placed in the hands of every young person who is struggling to know why they are here and what they are meant to do. When we know our identity in Christ, the labels that are given to us have no power. Thank you for taking the time to write these words. I know that because of you, this generation can and will change the world for the better as they respond to their calling in Christ.”

Pastor Henry and Alex Seeley, cofounders
of The Belonging Co.

“When Arden asked me to read the first chapter of *Redefined*, my expectation was to hear the words of a millennial who loves God. However, I was overwhelmed with amazement by what I read. I heard a young man, who is very much in touch with the challenges of his generation but speaks to them with the wisdom of a fifty-year-old. I was inspired, encouraged, and challenged, and my faith was built to new levels. I was in awe, for I received life-transforming revelation knowledge that could only be given by the Holy Spirit.

Arden is a leader, who loves God deeply, passionately loves his family, and is tender and compassionate to all he comes in contact with. The fruit of the Spirit that stands out in his life is faithfulness.

I feel privileged to be his father, but I know he is a gift to the body of Christ at large. I know your life will be changed not only by the words of his message but also by the strength of this young man’s heart.”

John Bevere, bestselling author and minister;
cofounder of Messenger International

“Arden has labored tirelessly over this message for years. *Redefined* is more than a book; it is a clarion call to a generation who knows they are destined for something *more* and won’t be constrained by labels that suggest something *less*. Each chapter debunks another word that has sought to systematically undermine all that God has woven within his sons and daughters.”

Lisa Bevere, bestselling author and minister;
cofounder of Messenger International

“Arden Bevere brings a new and fresh perspective to an ancient yet still applicable truth. The world attempts to label us by our actions but God calls us according to his plans. This message is for everyone who has allowed the wrong labels to keep them from fulfilling their destiny. I believe this book has the power to change your life.”

Justin Dailey, lead pastor, Action Church

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ARDEN BEVERE



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Arden Bevere, Redefined

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THE POWER OF A WORD

Handle them carefully, for words have more power than atom bombs.

Pearl Strachan Hurd

FROM THE MOMENT we are born, the words spoken over us begin to mold our identity, for better or for worse. Relatives, teachers, and peers comment on our appearance, our character, and our personality. As we grow, these words begin to accumulate in our mind and build an image of who we are, or more accurately, who we *think* we are or should be.

The reality that words have the power to identify and shape us first struck me while I was researching a project at work. I'd been asked to come up with some ways the ministry I was working with could more effectively reach people in my generation. As I brainstormed, I began to realize that the first step to reach and serve my peers was to gain a better understanding of how they see themselves. So

I posted this question on my Facebook page: If you could describe the young adult generation today in one word, what would it be?

The answers that came in were almost as surprising as the speed with which they were posted: *Lost. Unhappy. Searching. Hungry. Distracted. Lazy. Broken. Lacking. Entitled. Disillusioned.* There were some positive words sprinkled in as well, but the majority of the responses were negative.

It broke my heart to see the way people view my generation. I was especially saddened to see that many of the responses were from my peers: people in their twenties and thirties. These words expressed what they believed to be true about themselves. My people, my generation, described themselves as so much less than they are called to be.

As I read through the comments, God began to place some passages from the Bible in my heart that declare the opposite of the negative words people had written. One verse that especially stood out to me was 1 Peter 2:9.

But you are not like that, for you are a chosen people. You are royal priests, a holy nation, God's very own possession. As a result, you can show others the goodness of God, for he called you out of the darkness into his wonderful light. (NLT)

It would be an understatement to say that God's view of us is positive. This description is bursting with pride and excitement. The passage uses words like *chosen, royal, and holy.* We belong to him. We are called with a holy purpose.

Just as importantly, note what this verse does not say—that we are lost, lazy, entitled, or broken. In other words, we are not doomed or obligated to live up to the negative

labels that we have placed on ourselves—quite the opposite! We are called to fulfill God’s plans and live up to his expectations.

Here’s the problem for twenty- and thirtysomethings though. At our age and stage of life, things get real. Scary real. And in the face of uncertainty and adversity, if we don’t truly know who we are, we will fall back on the words spoken over us and the image of ourselves that we’ve built from them. We will choose careers, navigate relationships, and build families under the shadow of critical self-labels and a negative self-image.

Rather than living under those negative shadows, however, we must realize something: a label limits us to how the world sees us. A label speaks to who we are now, and it limits us to what has already happened. That is the tendency of the world and society around us—to define ourselves based on our past or present.

A calling, on the other hand, speaks to the future, to whom God has created us to be and what he plans for us to do. Our calling is based on God’s original design for us. It goes beyond the trauma or pain we have been through, the mistakes we have committed, and the circumstances we are in right now.

Our calling trumps labels every time. Labels shrink our world; callings enlarge our world. Labels disqualify and limit us; callings qualify and release us. Labels are temporary; callings are eternal.

CALL TO A GENERATION

Our generation is called to change the world. I truly believe that. But in order to step into our full potential and true

identity, we must *redefine* the way we see ourselves. We must listen to the right voices and believe the right words. We must confront and reject the labels that limit us and restore the calling of God that defines us.

Before you can confront something, though, you have to identify it. That's why the apostle Paul wrote, "I do not fight like a boxer beating the air" (1 Cor. 9:26). Paul knew his goal in life, and he knew what he was fighting.

In this book, I will unpack ten negative words that are often spoken about our generation—both by others and by us—and I will compare and contrast them to what God's Word says about us. For each negative term, there is a corresponding positive term that focuses on the identity and calling God has given us.

These are not the expected, obvious opposites though. They are more like companion words: concepts that reveal the positive truths hidden by negative labels. The more I studied the labels people use to describe our generation, the more I realized they actually point to deeper issues of self-worth, of character, and of value. The positive terms I have chosen to focus on are specifically designed to counteract these underlying problems.

That's what the title of this book means. It's about a change of perspective, a change of definition, and a change of value. We can't and we shouldn't try to change the essence of our generation. We are who we are. We are valued and loved by God. We are called for such a time as this. But we *can* and *must* allow God to show us how he sees us. We must let his perspective redefine ours.

And while my main goal is to help us realize that we have more options than just the lost and entitled generation, the

biblical truths condensed in each chapter are applicable to all generations and can challenge and lead anyone, regardless of their age.

Before we break down these words, let's consider the magnitude of the human language and how quickly our vocabulary increases as we grow older. According to a blog called *Word Counter*, the average one-year-old will recognize roughly fifty words. This increases to five thousand words by age four and then to ten thousand by age eight.¹

My oldest brother, Addison, is one of those people who has an incredibly expansive vocabulary. When we talk, he often uses terms I don't understand. If I ask him what in the world he's talking about, he'll give me the simple word, the word "normal" people use, to explain what he means. My response is always the same: "Why didn't you just say that?"

My point is that with over one million words in the English language, we have a plethora of terms at our disposal. We don't have to settle for the words that are always used, and we must be intentional about choosing new ones. The Bible says the words we speak can bring either life or death (Prov. 18:21). For every negative word of death, there are thousands of words of life that could be used in its place. We have the power to reimagine the words spoken over us and thereby redirect the trajectory of our lives.

I was heartbroken when reading the answers to my Facebook question because I know this generation is called to be world changers, but so many of us have failed to realize that potential. We have been speaking the wrong words over ourselves because we haven't allowed our creator to define us. We were designed by God to make a difference here on

earth, but in order to do that, we must reject false labels and choose to agree with the way God sees us.

COHEIRS WITH CHRIST

When we know who we are, we know how we should live. My parents helped me learn this early in life. They used to tell my brothers and me that we were princes. *Princes?* Most little girls like to be called princesses, but as little boys, we were not so enthusiastic at our parents' labeling. To add to our confusion, they didn't call us princes when we were acting right but when we were acting *out* instead. After we had done something we shouldn't have, they would look us right in the eyes and say, "You are a prince, and princes do not act like that." They didn't call us princes because of our family ancestry or because we resembled the heroes of the latest Disney movie. No, they were referring to our place as children of God. They helped us see that we are called to a higher standard, because God adopted us as coheirs with Christ (Rom. 8:17).

At the time, of course, I didn't fully understand the significance behind their lesson. But as I grew older, I learned to hold myself to the standards of a prince, a coheir of Christ. That doesn't mean I was perfect—far from it. I have made my share of mistakes, and I'm sure I'll make more. But as I look back over my teenage and early adult years, I know that I have always strived to align my decisions with that identity. I have made far more good choices than bad ones, and even when I have made poor choices, I've known deep inside it wasn't who I was. And that knowledge spurred me to adjust my lifestyle.

My point is not that I am better than anyone or that I have some superhuman level of self-control. Not even close. Rather, the identity my parents built into me by calling me a “prince” became an inner voice that shaped my self-image and directed many of my decisions. I am grateful to my parents for affirming my God-given identity in those formative years rather than labeling me based on my negative behavior or mistakes.

FIGHTING WITH OUR IDENTITIES INTACT

My mom often told her boys that the spiritual attacks we go through in life are more based on who we are going to become rather than who we currently are or who we used to be. In other words, the enemy will try to get us to question our identity so he can stop us from fulfilling our God-given calling. He wants us to doubt who we are called to be. If he can destroy our purpose, then he can more easily influence our behavior.

Remember how 1 Peter 2:9 describes us: a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s special possession who declares his praises. With that kind of calling and that big of a future, it’s no wonder the enemy tries to attack our sense of identity every chance he gets. The enemy would not attack someone unless he is threatened by them. Who would he be threatened by? Citizens of heaven. World changers. Sons and daughters of God.

We see an example of this when Satan tested Jesus after he spent forty days fasting and praying in the wilderness. Jesus had just started his ministry, and the devil came to tempt him.

The tempter came to him and said, “If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread.” (Matt. 4:3)

The enemy’s first strategy was to challenge Jesus’s *identity* in order to provoke wrong *actions*. He hoped insecurity would lead Jesus to make wrong choices. In this case, he wanted to lead Jesus into an empty, selfish display of power and into satisfying his own human needs outside of God’s plan. He was trying to cause Jesus to sin, so he attacked his sense of identity.

Remember, the devil knew who Jesus was. He didn’t doubt that Jesus was the Son of God. Rather, he was trying to use the rhetorical statement “if you are the Son of God” as a manipulative tactic to push Jesus into making a mistake.

But Jesus didn’t flinch. He didn’t back down. Rather than reacting out of insecurity, he responded with confidence. He knew that doing what the enemy wanted wouldn’t prove his identity, and he knew he didn’t have anything to prove in the first place. He was secure in his identity and mission. The devil’s attack failed because there were no cracks of insecurity where his arrows of doubt could take effect.

The enemy will use the same strategy to attack you—not because he thinks you’re weak, useless, or a nobody but because he knows your true identity and he is frightened by it. He will try to find insecurities and use them to move your focus off your true identity in Jesus and onto what he wants you to do in your own power. That probably won’t be turning rocks into bread (even though that would be a neat party trick), but it will resemble similarly empty and self-focused attempts to prove your worth or create your own identity that is separate from God. If the enemy can distract you

from who you are in Christ, then controlling your choices becomes far easier for him. As a child of God, you must have a firm understanding of who you are so that you can stay focused and avoid becoming deceived when tests and temptations come.

Jesus wasn't the only one who knew the importance of basing his identity in the Bible. In Acts 22, we find the apostle Paul facing off with a Roman officer. Paul was about to be flogged, which was one of the most painful punishments a person could endure. Victims were tied up, stretched out, and struck with a multitailed whip.

Just before the punishment began, Paul looked at the Roman officer and asked, "Is it legal for you to flog a Roman citizen who hasn't even been found guilty?" (v. 25). Paul was being tried as a Jew, which meant the Roman officials were denying him the rights and authority belonging to him as a Roman.

The man who was in charge of whipping Paul told his boss about Paul's Roman identity. As soon as the commanding officer realized who Paul was, he became very afraid, because he had not given Paul the treatment his citizenship mandated. He immediately began treating Paul differently.

If Paul had that much power just because he was a citizen of Rome, how much more power do we have as citizens of the kingdom of God? We, too, need to realize that, regardless of the challenges we face, we can stand on the rights and authority that come from our identity.

When the officers questioned Paul about his ancestry, he responded, "I was born a citizen" (v. 28). In the same way, each of us is born into the kingdom of God by faith. Whether you come from a Christian background or not, the moment

you put your faith in Jesus, you were “born again” (John 3:3). You were given a new identity and a new purpose. You were called out of darkness and into freedom and victory!

Just like Jesus and Paul experienced, we can expect resistance, temptations, and attacks from the enemy. So how do we respond? First of all, we must *decide to fight*. When a soldier knows he is about to be attacked, he has two options: retreat or fight. In the same way, the knowledge that the enemy will attack our identity and sense of purpose can produce fear and paralysis, or it can motivate us to take a stand and fight back. It’s our choice. We must decide not to give in to the assault against our generation but fight to be the people God has called us to be.

Our second response, once we have decided to fight, should be to *learn to fight well*. As soldiers in God’s army, we are called to fight in faith through the power of the Word of God.

Jesus fought Satan’s temptations in the wilderness by quoting Scripture, and Paul said the Word of God is like a sword (Eph. 6:17). Both Jesus and Paul knew that the Word of God is the most powerful weapon we can use against the devil.

For the word of God is alive and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart. (Heb. 4:12)

Notice how God’s Word has the power to peer deep into our own souls and hearts. It strengthens us, it teaches us truth, and it prepares us to stand against the lies of the enemy.

Like any weapon, we have to learn how to wield this sword. We must have it ingrained in our hearts so that our minds are not easily swayed from the truth. The more we know about what the Bible says regarding our identity, the less we will be affected by the attacks, temptations, and lies of the enemy.

My prayer is that this book would not just show you what the Bible says but that it would also prepare you for battle by teaching you how to speak the Word of God over your life and over our whole generation.

COMMUNITY LANGUAGE

Words are powerful in the life of an individual, but they are even more powerful when they are the common language of a community.

We see this power illustrated in the biblical story of the tower of Babel, which is found in Genesis and takes place after the worldwide flood described in Genesis 6. The writer of Genesis indicates that at this point in history, everyone in the region spoke the same language. They were unified in language and purpose—but their purpose was not the right one. They were actually disobeying God.

After the flood, God instructed Noah and his sons to spread out and fill the earth as their families grew and increased in number. But just a couple chapters later, we see the people had a different goal in mind.

Come, let us build ourselves a city, with a tower that reaches to the heavens, so that we may make a name for ourselves.
(Gen. 11:4)

Rather than spreading out to fill the earth, they banded together to build a city and a name for themselves, along with a tower that was probably a ziggurat, an ancient temple. In other words, they abandoned their relationship with God and united in rebellion against him. In response to their plans, God made a remarkable statement: “If as one people speaking the same language they have begun to do this, then nothing they plan to do will be impossible for them” (Gen. 11:6).

God knew that their plans would only lead them further away from him, so he caused them to speak different languages. This produced confusion, of course, and ultimately, they scattered to different parts of the earth, fulfilling God’s original command.

Wow! This story highlights the power and potential within a group of people who speak the same language and rally around the same vision.

God didn’t have a problem with his people speaking one language. His concern was that they were using their unity in disobedient and prideful ways. Imagine if their intentions had been good instead of destructive. Imagine if their vision centered around lifting up God’s name instead of their own.

Now, imagine what *we* could do if we were united! That is my goal with this book—to bring our generation together under one language. I don’t mean English or Spanish or French; I mean the same kingdom language. We must use our words for life not death and for building not destroying. We must be united in one righteous cause, not to make our name famous but to make God’s name famous.

If the people of Babel were unified, God said, nothing would be impossible for them. I believe there is going to be

a massive move of God's Spirit upon the earth, one that begins with youth and young adults and spreads to the entire world. But in order for us to bring about that change, we need to be united in heart and language under his Word. If we are, nothing we set out to do as sons and daughters of God will be impossible.

Do you see how powerful words can be? They determine our identity, they guide our actions, and they provide a common language to accomplish great things together. For the remainder of this book, we will look at the words often used to describe this generation and examine what they mean and represent, and then we'll replace them with words God uses to describe us. As we do, we're going to strengthen our foundations and grow into who God has called us to be.

Let's begin this journey together!