

ME

from me to we

WE

Is life all about Me? A Me lifestyle is about the isolated individual—my ideas, my agenda, my concerns alone. From this vantage point, life is about making Me the best I can be. But faith in Jesus Christ draws us into We, where there is a relationship with God and others. We means setting our opinions aside and submitting in faith to Jesus Christ. We means being part of a family—a community of faith, united across racial and social lines. Journey with us from Me to We as we study the book of Ephesians this summer.

FROM ME TO WE • EPHESIANS 1:1-14 • Tim McConnell • June 3, 2018

Are you living in the Land of Me? Me is a pretty good place to live. No one really bothers you. You do just about whatever you want, I suppose. If you want to play Xbox for twelve hours at a time or binge-watch five seasons of some show from the 90's, well, if you're living in the Land of Me that's fine. But there are some problems too. "We" sees things that "Me" can't see. For example, if it was just Me, I might have spent \$1200 dollars on a set of golf clubs, but We, the wisdom of we, showed me that was not the best use of resources. In the Land of Me, I might have bought a Harley at one point or another, but We helped reveal that motorcycles are not very safe or useful for more than one person to get around, so We was able to keep Me from making that mistake. We is really pretty smart, isn't she? ...I mean, We! Not "she." We! Actually, do you know what we are about to learn here? This summer, Ephesians is going to show us something. The Land of Me is actually a farce. It doesn't exist. There is no land where who you are, and what you do, and how you choose, and what you believe, fails to impact those around you. There is no Land of Me, and as much as we try to live there, it only hurts us and those around us. It's time to learn about the Land of We. It starts with recognizing that God is there, and God has a plan for us that beats my plan for me.

Ephesus was an enormous ancient city and it had a small Christian community, maybe founded by John. Paul came to Ephesus with a ministry couple named Priscilla and Aquila, a married couple who were expelled from Rome when all the Jews and Christians were expelled from Rome by Emperor Claudius in A.D. 49. They lived in Corinth but travelled with Paul and you can read in Acts 18 about the founding of the church in Ephesus. Paul actually lived in Ephesus for about three years. But now it's much later. Paul is in prison in Rome, and probably around the year A.D. 62, he writes to the church he loves. It isn't a response to any huge particular problem, just loving encouragement to this beloved community of faith to keep on with Jesus. If there is any theme to it, it is unity. What Christ has done for one, Christ has done for all, and in Christ all are one. No matter where you come from, no matter your background, when you come into the sav-

ing work of Christ you come under Jesus as the Head of Household—you enter His home, His family. All the barriers drop, they are destroyed actually, and we believers are one. It's about the prayer Jesus offered in John 17, just before He died. Jesus prayed that all His followers would remember they belong to God and not the world, that they would be faithful to God's name, that they would be sanctified in the word of truth, and that they would be unified in their mission to go into the world with the good news about Jesus. He prayed "that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you...so that the world may believe that you have sent me" (John 17:21). This was what was happening in Ephesus.

Do you want to live in the Land of Me, or do you want to learn about the Land of We? Paul greets them, verse 1, "Paul, an apostle ["apostle" means a "sent one," a messenger] of Christ Jesus by the will of God, To God's holy people ["saints"; Paul calls them "saints." They are holy, not because of what they have done but because of what Christ did for them to forgive their sins. If you are in Christ, you share the holiness of Jesus. That's His plan] in Ephesus, the faithful in Christ Jesus: Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ." (Ephesians 1:1-2). A quick note. Paul says "Grace and Peace to you." This is his characteristic greeting. In Greek, "Hello" was "Chairein." It literally means, "Joy to you" but it's just a way of saying Hello. Paul says, "Grace and Peace" or "Charis kai Eirene." He took the classic Hello and made a Christian greeting. Just a cool thing to know.

But more important is Paul calling these people "saints." Do you think of yourself as a saint? Here we get our first clear distinction between my plan and God's plan. In the Land of Me, in my plan, I might plan to do as well as I can in life, get the most I can out of life, and try to behave enough to be counted a reasonably good person. Maybe even in the upper fifty percent, right? But certainly not so bad as some guys I know. Pretty good. Good enough. You know, on what basis will you enter the Kingdom of God? On the basis of pretty good? If that's the game, let's think about this. Who do you know for sure on that scheme is good enough to get into heaven? Mother The-

resa? Billy Graham? Saint Peter and Saint Paul? Put them on a scale, up toward the top. Now add yourself. Where are you on that scale? Are you sure this is a good plan? God's plan is not my plan. Saint Paul himself, was not counting on his plan and his goodness to be received into God's family. He was counting on what Jesus had done for him on the cross to pay for his sins and offer him the holiness of Christ as a gift. God's plan isn't to sneak me in the back door with a wink and a "good enough." God's plan is to walk me through the front gate clothed in the righteousness of His Son Jesus—to name me holy. That's God's plan. It beats my plan.

The next part, verses 3-14, is originally one long sentence without a break, 202 words. Paul just explodes with emotion here! It makes up kind of a passionate soliloquy, like a Shakespearean soliloquy. Ephesus was famous for its enormous outdoor theater that could seat over 20,000 for plays and performances. This could be a soliloquy to rival Homer, or Virgil, or Ovid, but the subject of this speech is the passionate worship and praise of God: "Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ" (Ephesians 1:3). Blessed be God who blessed us with every blessing. God's plan for us beats the Land of Me.

"For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love he predestined us for adoption to sonship through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will" (Ephesians 1:4-5). God's plan versus my plan. God chose. God predestined. In love God adopted. God's plan, not mine. Some of you know enough to cringe a little at that predestination language, knowing how Christians have debated its meaning over the centuries. Don't let this be a topic to drive Christians apart. Look, "In love he predestined us for adoption." It's an act of love. Whenever it sounds like predestination is an affront to love, something has gone off course. What does this mean? It means this: God is always prior. God is in the room well before you walk into the party. God has a plan. Are you sweating your plan for your life? Are you stressed about making the most of things and doing well, living life well? God has a plan for your life. A plan for you to join His family in Jesus Christ. God is always prior; God always comes first. Before you were born,

God thought of you. Eugene Peterson said this so well, "Our identity doesn't begin with us. There's something previous to what we think about ourselves, and that something is what God thinks of us. This means that everything we think and feel is by nature a response. And the one to whom we respond is God. We never speak the first word. We never make the first move. God is always previous" (Message Study Bible, p. 1143). God always comes first. God's plan is better than my plan.

Verse 6, "to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the One he loves." My plan might be to earn it, God's plan of grace is to freely give it. "In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace that he lavished on us" (Ephesians 1:7-8). My plan would be to punish wrongs, work for good, try to do more good than bad and earn my way into heaven. God's plan is redemption through the blood of Jesus, forgiveness of sins—grace. Grace God lavished on us. My plan might be just enough grace to cover the need; God's plan is to lavish it on us. Abundant, overflowing, overwhelming love and mercy. All, as it goes on, according to the mystery of His will, according to His own good pleasure, made known to us in Jesus Christ, "to bring unity to all things in heaven and on earth under Christ" (Ephesians 1:10).

My plan? Pretend to live in the Land of Me. God's plan? Unite all things in Jesus Christ. God's plan? You never walk alone again. "In him we were also chosen, having been predestined according to the plan of him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will, in order that we, who were the first to put our hope in Christ, might be for the praise of his glory" (Ephesians 1:11-12). And watch this now: "And you also were included in Christ when you heard the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation. When you believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit" (Ephesians 1:13). It's open to you. All who call on the name of the Lord will be saved. When you believe you are marked by a seal. Ancient cults in Ephesus and other cities would mark converts with scars, or special haircuts, or tattoos or brands—when you believe in Jesus, you are marked, you are sealed, by the very presence of God within you. The Holy Spirit inside you. It declares you are never alone

again. It declares you belong not to yourself but to God in Christ your Savior. It declares that you are not in the Land of Me but in the family of God by adoption through Jesus. It declares, and promises, and guarantees that no matter what you face in life today, you belong to the Kingdom of Heaven and the inheritance is coming to the praise of His glory!

So we come to the family table to take the family meal. We take communion today. Living by my plan, pretending to live in the Land of Me, it fractures things. It's time to let Jesus move in like a careful surgeon and start to knit together the things that have fractured. Living spun-apart lives in a spun-apart world leaves too many pieces scattered all around. There are breaks, fractures, between Me and God, between Me and my neighbor, between Me and creation or even Me and myself! But in Christ Jesus we are adopted into one family, around one table, by one body being broken to spill one blood for all. As Jesus said, "People will come from east and west and north and south, and will take their places at the feast in the kingdom of God" (Luke 13:29). This table always has a place. It has a place for you. There is always room for one more! Here we move from my plan to God's plan; from the Land of Me to the Land of We; from fractured and broken and alone, to one in the household of God.

STUDY GUIDE

FROM ME TO WE • EPHESIANS 1:1-14

UP: Connect With God Through Spending Time in God's Word

Read the passage for the week: Ephesians 1:1-14. Allow a few moments to silently reflect on what you heard. Underline or note words or phrases that seem meaningful. Pray for your study of God's Word.

- If you were one of the Christians who initially received Paul's letter, what would have been your first impression of what Paul shared in today's passage? What would have been encouraging? Challenging?
- The Apostle Paul wrote Ephesians in prison. What seems to be on Paul's mind while in prison? If you had been in Paul's place, what would you have written about?
- In verse 3 Paul says, "Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ." What is a non-spiritual blessing? What are the spiritual blessings Paul goes on to list?
- In verses 5-11 what are we told about God's will? What is the ultimate purpose of His will?
- When you think of God's will or plan, what do you typically think about?
- When do you have a hard time trusting God's plan? How does this passage encourage you to trust that you belong to God and that God is in control?

OUT: Connect With the World Around Us by Joining God in God's Mission

God has a plan! In the week ahead ask the Lord to guide you and direct your steps. Try an experiment: each morning ask God to lead you throughout your day. Then reflect back later this week with these questions: Who did God bring across your path? How did you see God directing you? What conversations or circumstances opened up in the course of your normal day?

IN: Connect With the Family of God

Paul says that all of us have been adopted as God's children through Jesus Christ. We are now brothers and sisters in Christ. We go from ME to WE. In the family of God, we have the joy of praying for one another. Ask someone this week how you can be praying for them.