

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 1:15-23 • Katie Fowler • June 10, 2018

When I was in high school, I went to a big concert in my hometown. Now if I tell you who the concert was for, you can't judge me...do we all agree on this? It was for the boy band—NSYNC. I know what you are thinking, and I think you are right, I do have really good taste in music. But I remember I was 17 years old and at this huge concert. There was this massive football stadium full of people. Everybody was there to see this band, all these people going crazy for this one act on stage. It's amazing how music pulls people together.

In fact, fan bases have their own names. Taylor Swift fans are called "Swifties." Justin Bieber fans are "Beliebers." Jimmy Buffet fans are called "parrotheads." But it's not just music, sports teams create these passionate fan bases pulling people together from all over a city, a region of our country. People from different backgrounds come together and everybody wears the same colors, sings the same fight songs, roots against the same rival teams. You got Cheeseheads up in Wisconsin, and Red Sox Nation in Boston. During the Broncos Super Bowl run, we were "United in Orange." When the Cubs finally won the World Series in 2016, it felt like everybody in the country was a Cubs fan ...well almost everybody. Sad Cleveland fans...again. But it's not just sports that can bring people together. Hobbies and common interests bring people together—biking, cooking, board games, climbing! I got invited last weekend to a hiking with babies group. Hiking brings all sorts of people together—even babies! 'Bout time babies came together. And there are causes, a lot of issues that matter so deeply to people and they rally together to make a difference. All of a sudden, friendships can form in the most unlikely of places.

As great as all those things are, what happens when we want a connection that runs deeper, what happens when we want more? And what happens when we can't seem to find a way to come together, when we get stuck in isolation and loneliness, and all the shared hobbies and music in the world can't bring us together? Where do we turn? Here is what I want us to see today: Nothing unites like the name of Jesus. Nothing. Because the name of Jesus has power. Power to heal, to restore, to make new.

Nothing unites like the name of Jesus. Jesus is the one who moves towards us in His mercy and grace and draws us into God's family. No more "alone." Jesus is the one who extends forgiveness to the sinner and love to the unlovely. Jesus is the one who draws us into God's story. Jesus is the one who brings us together. Nothing unites like the name of Jesus. For Christ is our head. And we are His body. That's the image in our passage today.

Hear again verses 22 and 23: "And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way." Christ

is our head. He is the one who truly brings us together.

As we saw last week, a huge theme in the book of Ephesians is unity. Oneness in Christ. The New Testament authors point to this reality—something new is happening in Jesus, old divisions are falling away, dividing lines are being erased, relationships that seemed beyond repair are being made whole, reconciliation is being experienced around dinner tables and as people gather in worship around the Lord's table.

In fact, the Apostle Paul in another letter, this time to the church in Galatia writes these stunning words, "There is neither Jew nor Gentile neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus" (Galatians 3:28). That's absolutely revolutionary! Look what Jesus does! Nothing unites like the name of Jesus. Nothing. And the early church was experiencing this reality—the body of Christ was made up of rich and poor, slave and free, men and women, young and old, Jews and Gentiles. Was it hard at times? Messy? I am sure, but they were experiencing Jesus doing something in their midst. The gospel unleashed in a community. The Spirit of the Living God at work to unite really unlikely people!

Maybe at this point, you want to raise your hand and say, "what?" Maybe you are here and not a Christian and you want to raise an objection. You want to cry foul because your experiences suggest something different. Nothing unites like the name of Jesus? What about all of the denominations that exist? What about the history of Christian groups fighting each other, persecuting each other? What about literal wars that have been fought in the past between Christian groups? During the Civil Rights Era, Martin Luther King Jr. famously noted how "appalling" it was that the "most segregated hour in America is eleven o'clock on Sunday morning."

I was reading this past week about a movement during the 1960s to see churches no longer segregated in the South, through a series of what were called "kneel-ins." Often young, Black college students would come to the steps of a segregated white church seeking to worship with their fellow Christians. Some churches would respond and welcome them in, others would block the door and deny them entrance. How tragically and sinfully those white churches in the South missed the heart of Jesus. How did these churches so miss the heart of Jesus? How did Christians throughout history miss the heart of Jesus? And if we are honest, how do we at times miss the heart of Jesus? These questions lead us to confession and repentance. To seek forgiveness from those whom we have wronged. Because we see Jesus' heart so clearly in John 17. Pastor Tim talked last week about this prayer of Jesus. Right before he was betrayed and arrested, Jesus prays, Jesus prays for us.

Revealing his heart to us, Jesus prays to the Father that we would be one. "I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one—I in them

and you in me—so that they may be brought to complete unity. Then the world will know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me” (John 17:22-23).

Jesus’ desire is for unity. That we would come together showing the world who Jesus is—that Jesus is Lord. That we would come together as body of Christ— young and old, rich and poor, black and white, all races, revealing the love of God, this God who is three in one, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. And the good news is, nothing unites like the name of Jesus. Nothing.

Maybe this is when your cynicism starts to rise. Your skepticism. How can that happen? Naive, little pastor—let’s talk real world. How can that happen? How can old wounds really be healed? How can dividing lines truly be erased? How can reconciliation ever happen? Five words: by the power of God. We are talking about the mighty strength of God. In our passage, the Apostle Paul says to the Christians in Ephesus, “I am so thankful for you.” Verse 16: “I have not stopped giving thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers.” He says, “I can’t stop giving thanks for you. And I am praying for you.” Friends, something powerful happens when we start praying for each other.

Paul hits his knees praying because he wants these brothers and sisters in Christ to know God, to know the hope they have in Christ, to know the glorious future they have in Christ and to know the power of God. To know it, not just like head knowledge, but experiential knowledge. To not just talk about it, hear about it, but experience it. Friends, the Christian life is not just a bunch of ideas, it is meant to be lived and experienced. Not just a bunch of theories to be tossed about. But lived. Life with God. And for us to not just talk about unity but experience it. Paul says, I want you to know the power of God.

How can we know? How can we know God’s power? How can we know God’s power can really make a difference? Because on the third day, when all hope seemed lost, when it seemed like forces of darkness and evil had in fact won, when it seemed like death would reign, on that third day, God raised Jesus from the dead. And exalted Him. There is no loneliness like the grave. If God reached in then to break that isolation, God can get to you. God can draw you in. Hear again Ephesians 1:19-20: “And his incomparably great power for us who believe. That power is the same as the mighty strength he exerted when he raised Christ from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms.” This Jesus, this Jesus who suffered and died. This Jesus who was raised to life, who was exalted. This Jesus is the one who can make us one.

Scripture tells us that God’s power is made perfect in weakness. So when we see no way to move towards each other, when we can’t figure out where to even start, we look to Jesus. Jesus can bring us together when nothing else can. Because Jesus is the one enthroned above it all.

Above every other power, every so-called rival claimant to the throne, every evil force in our world, every name—

the name of Jesus is above them all. And there is no dethroning this King, this good King, this suffering King, the King who died for us, there is no usurping His power. Ever. In this age, in the age to come...Jesus is over all.

God has placed everything under His feet, making Him the head of all things, and head of the church. The church which is His body. The fullness of Him. Which means this: Jesus fills His body, His people, with His presence. He fills us, the church. Picture Jesus at the head of this table. Drawing people in, setting a place for all who call on His name. See them coming...people from the east and west, north and south, taking their place at the feast. Followers of Jesus from Mongolia and Mexico, Kenya and Brazil. Brothers and Sisters in Christ who are chronically homeless, refugees, business women and retirees. Six year olds and seventy-six year olds. Prostitutes and Tax Collectors, Prodigals and Runaways. All by His grace, we gather.

And He fills us with His presence. That’s why nothing unites us like the name of Jesus.

The fullness of Jesus filling us. How can dividing walls ever come down? How can we truly live as family together? How can we name wrongs and start to forgive each other? How can we truly know each other? To pray meaningfully for each other? To trust one another enough to speak Scripture into each other’s lives? How can we move towards people in the body who are different from us? Talk differently, act differently, think differently, vote differently?

How can we move from Me to We? Five words: by the power of God. It’s not our good manners, it’s not our common background, it’s not just as long as we avoid talking about hard stuff—the one, the only who can bring us together is Jesus. My friend works on staff at a church in another state. Two women in her church found themselves at an impasse. Deep in relational conflict they met with my friend. And at their first meeting, they opened up God’s Word and prayed together, listening for God’s voice. They started by acknowledging the Lord—before we get to the conflict and address it, they started by recognizing we are one in the Lord. Nothing unites like the name of Jesus.

I want you to try something: move towards someone this week—maybe someone who looks different from you, someone from another generation, someone that you have written off in the past, someone in the Church whom you don’t know very well—move towards them in the name of Jesus. Ask them their name, how you can pray for them, listen to their story. Move towards someone this week in the name of Jesus. For nothing unites like the name of Jesus.

I was at a concert a couple of weeks ago, and no, it wasn’t for a boy band. It was singer/songwriter Sara Groves. She told the story of the cellist of Sarajevo. During the Bosnian War, in the midst horrific devastation, this man went out after these bombings and attacks and he played his cello. Sometimes it was the

day after a bombing, he would dress in his formal wear and head for the bombed out area. There he would play this beautiful music, the contrary song. It was beauty in the midst of rubble. And it gave people hope. As I heard Sara Groves tell this story, she likened it to our role as Christians. We go out playing our song, our gospel song. We lift high the name of Jesus. In the bombed out areas of our world, we play our gospel song. For the bombs are falling around us every day. All around us, people sow seeds of discord, make it about us vs. them. There is this temptation: to choose fear over love. But we followers of Jesus, we go out playing a different song. Only Jesus can unite us. Only Jesus can bring us together. We move towards others in the name of Jesus, playing our gospel song.

Hear these words from our Master Jesus. This is Jesus' prayer for us. "Holy Father, protect them by the power of your name, the name you gave me, so that they may be one as we are one.

"I am coming to you now, but I say these things while I am still in the world, so that they may have the full measure of my joy within them. I have given them your word and the world has hated them, for they are not of the world any more than I am of the world. My prayer is not that you take them out of the world but that you protect them from the evil one. They are not of the world, even as I am not of it. Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth. As you sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world. For them I sanctify myself, that they too may be truly sanctified.

"My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me. I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one—I in them and you in me—so that they may be brought to complete unity. Then the world will know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.

"Father, I want those you have given me to be with me where I am, and to see my glory, the glory you have given me because you loved me before the creation of the world.

"Righteous Father, though the world does not know you, I know you, and they know that you have sent me. I have made you known to them, and will continue to make you known in order that the love you have for me may be in them and that I myself may be in them" (John 17:11, 13-26).

To God be the glory. Make us one Lord Jesus, we pray, Amen.

STUDY GUIDE

FROM ME TO WE • EPHESIANS 1:15-23

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

Read the passage for the week: Ephesians 1:15-23. 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 a Christian living in Ephesus receiving Paul's letter, what encouragement would the Apostle Paul's prayer have offered you?
- Re-read verses 22 and 23. In your own words, what does it mean that Christ is the head of the Church?
- Read Jesus' prayer for us in John 17:20-26. Why do you think unity and oneness in the body of Christ matters so much to Jesus?
- What does unity in the Church look like? What positive or negative examples of Church unity have you experienced in your own life?
- How do you think we can grow in unity and oneness as a local church and as the wider Church?
- 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

Move towards someone this week in the name of Jesus. Offer a word of encouragement, an offer of prayer, or buy someone lunch and ask more about their story.

IN: Connect With the Family of God

Pray for unity at First Pres and in the Church in Colorado Springs.