

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 2:1-10 • Tim McConnell • June 17, 2018

Father's Day. It makes me think of the story of two Saturdays. A father, trying to keep the discipline of a daily journal writes at the end of a Saturday, "June 16—Not much to say. Good day with the family." His seven-year old son, keeping his first diary writes, "June 16—BEST DAY EVER! Dad and me made waffles. I spilled some. Dad said it was okay. We played catch in the yard. I caught one real high. Dad caught one between his legs!! Went to the pool. Did my first cannonball! Pizza for dinner. I love Saturday!" How did that dad miss it? Man, it goes by quick. My son, Jack, just graduated high school then turned eighteen over the last couple of weeks. Maybe you've had this feeling, some of you dads—you have a child and start having some fun, then right about the time you realize this "Dad" thing is actually an awesome responsibility and there's so much you want to teach your child, they graduate and move out! Let me encourage you to jump in—I'm talking to you dads. I was so encouraged to see a bunch of dads up at Camp Elim last week as cabin leaders and counselors. Boy, we don't want to miss it.

Our passage today doesn't want us to miss it. And by "it," I mean a lot more than parenthood. This is a life-and-death kind of passage today. I'm scared to preach this passage. You can't give this passage justice. I ought to just read it to you again! We're talking about Me to We, studying how Ephesians calls us to leave a me-centered life and walk into a we-centered life with Jesus at the core. We heard last week: nothing unites like the name of Jesus, by the power of God. The same power that raised Jesus from the dead—that reached into the grave—reaches in to break us out of isolation and pull us into the community of faith, the household of God. Awesome stuff. It's more than just lonely versus accompanied. It's more than community-building. It's bigger than the social network. It's life or death to be in Christ or to be out of Christ. Listen now, you can live your way to death or you can die your way to life. It's a crossroads. You can live in a way that leads to death; or you can give your life over now to Jesus and know eternal life. It's that big. It's that stark a contrast.

"As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins," (this is a friend writing! Paul actually likes these people. They love each other dearly! Just read how Paul cries and the church cries in Acts 20 when they finally have to say goodbye. Paul loves these people! And he says, "you were dead!") "As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, in which you used to live" (Ephesians 2:1-2). Now, obviously they weren't dead. They were living people. What does Paul

mean then? Friends, there is a way to live life that is actually a walking death. There is a way of living that is no life at all. You can live to death. Dead in your transgressions and sins. What's a transgression? That's when you cross the line. You see the line there, but you just walk on over. You sin. You commit a crime against God's law while living in God's world. God set the line there, you walked over it, because in your heart you don't much care that it's God's world. You don't much care about God's ways. See how sin is actually about living as though God isn't there? It's disregard. Here it says this is death. You're not actually dead, but you're as good as dead. You're living to death, not to life. One of Jesus' most famous stories is the Parable of the Prodigal Son. The disobedient son wastes all his money chasing his own desires, and what does the Father say to this lost boy's older brother when he comes home? He says, come into the party: "But we had to celebrate and be glad, because this brother of yours was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found" (Luke 15:32).

Are you just living to death? Look at this description: "As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, in which you used to live when you" here we go now, (1) "followed the ways of this world." When you just drifted along with the current of all those around you. Oh, is that the way it is now? I thought God said something else. Oh well! Along I go. (2) "...and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient." This is a colorful way of talking about Satan. The Deceiver. The Adversary. Jesus says in John 10:10, there is an opposing force out there: "The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full." You were dead when you drifted along under the impulse of the Deceiver. He robs you of life. "Try this, do this, smoke this, watch this—oh it will add so much to your life. Oh, you'll be so funny. Oh, you'll have so many laughs. Just go on." No word about the corrosive poison to your soul, to your family, to your future, to your body. He comes to rob you. To steal your life! You were dead when you drifted along with the world, listening to the Deceiver, and third: (3) "All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our flesh and following its desires and thoughts" (Ephesians 2:3). Following the desires of our flesh, our internal compulsion. What's your inclination—oh, then go on ahead! You do you. You are not subject to be tugged around by whatever desire erupts within your flesh. Some of the things you feel inclined to do are not the best things to do! God's way is the life-giv-

ing way. Measure your own desires and inclinations and internal compulsions by God's ways—He has drawn the lines in good places, for you.

Listen, I don't want to be morbid, but I just want to be accurate to the text. Paul writes his beloved, dear friends and says, "When you lived like that, you were dead." The image you need to have is, I'm sorry to say, this is a little dark, but the image you need to have is of a corpse floating down a river. Just lifelessly drifting along. Subject only to where the currents push or pull—no life. No life at all. You can live to death. It just looks like this. Drifting down the river. Purposeless, meaningless, lifeless.

Kirsten Powers wrote a column last week in response to the suicides of Anthony Bourdain and Kate Spade, two people seemingly at the top of the ladder. She said the best way to help is to share stories of struggle with suicide and depression that people survived, and she told her own story. But she also said the reason suicide and depression are on the rise is something wrong with our culture—the push, push, push of a success-driven life founded on meaningless values. We disconnect from families, friends and communities to pursue personal achievement. Of course we're alone. Of course we're depressed. Powers writes, "Don't pathologize the despair that is a rational response to a culture that values people based on ever escalating financial and personal achievements... We should acknowledge that something is very wrong. We should stop telling people who yearn for a deeper meaning in life that they have an illness or need therapy. Instead, we need to help people craft lives that are more meaningful and built on a firmer foundation than personal success." I think she's right.

I think Paul knew that. That's what he was trying to say to his friends in Ephesus. And Paul knew what it was to drive his life down the road toward death. He knew what it was to live to death. He was once Saul—a rabid, fanatical persecutor of Jesus-followers, an anti-Christian terrorist. He watched a mob execute a teenager, Stephen. You can read about it in the Book of Acts chapter 7. Then it says, "And Saul approved of their killing him. On that day a great persecution broke out against the church... Godly men buried Stephen and mourned deeply for him. But Saul began to destroy the church. Going from house to house, he dragged off both men and women and put them in prison" (Acts 8:1-3). Saul is Paul. Same man, before he knew Jesus. See, Paul doesn't just say "you were dead." He says, "We were all like that. We were all dead. Living to death." Clear enough?

But that's not the end of it. "But because of his great

love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved. And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus" (Ephesians 2:4-6). From death to life. From dead to alive. Because of what? Because of God, rich in mercy. Because of His grace; because of His great love for us. You can live to death or you can know eternal life in Christ. How do we do that? We confess, we pray and recognize that our lives are not our own, that we belong to Jesus, we pray and recognize that we no longer live to ourselves, that we have been, as Paul says elsewhere, "I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me" (Galatians 2:20). It is so complete, so total a giving over of your life that Paul compares it to death. Jesus, Himself, calls it taking up your cross; "losing your life for my sake," He says. You can live to death or you can die—you can give your life over in your heart to Christ—and if you do that, then you live. You live. Not drifting along the river, pulled by the currents, dead to everything around you. You live. You are alive in Christ. By comparison, you see, before you know Christ you might as well already be in the grave. Cold and alone. Silent and lost. Isolated and unfeeling. Numb and without purpose. Adrift. "But... God because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved." You can live to death or you can die, give your life over to Jesus Christ, and live life as you never imagined.

"And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace," (It's all for His glory) "expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus. For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast" (Ephesians 2:6-9). What works, what great deeds and achievements will make up the existential basis of your life? Boast in them? You didn't save yourself when you were floating down the river, dead. All glory to God. He loves you so much, He reached down in Jesus—it's Jesus' hand you feel pulling you up—and grabbed you, and pulled you. Out of loneliness, into family. Out of death, into life.

In Christ, you will find purpose. Look here: "For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do" (Ephesians 2:10). He's got stuff for you.

Stuff you are going to love being a part of—His purposes, for His glory, and to your enduring joy and fulfillment. In Christ, you find purpose. Don't miss it. Don't live to death; die to live. Die now, not later. Put your life in Jesus' hands.

When you're living to death—when you're just drifting along, numb and lifeless—the people around you know it; they suffer. I've had the privilege to sit with many dying people. One father I will never forget. We were planning his memorial service, which it was clear was not far off, and he said to me, "Tim, please try to reach my boys for Christ." They were grown men. But, he said, he tried to give them everything. He tried to love and support them. He worked hard to provide for them, great schools, great homes, great vacations, great experiences...all that. But, he said, "Tim the one thing I never succeeded at sharing with them was Jesus. Now I can't. It's too late." His last wish was that I would do my very best to show his adult sons who Jesus is; what life is in Christ. I tried. Folks, it's not too late. It's not too late until it's too late. Don't live to death; with your life in Christ's hands be present and share eternal life with those you love.

I pulled a file on a sermon I preached on Father's Day in 2005. My family was in Virginia, where we lived, but I was preaching at an Army Chapel in Indiana where I was serving. I tried to encourage my fellow soldiers headed to Iraq at that time, that even though they were far away, they were not absent. They didn't have to be absent just because they were distant. You can be there and absent. The difference is attention, love—life! Ultimately life in Christ. Anyway, in that sermon I found this, and I just want to read it: "I received a little blessing on Father's Day. I got some cards and things, sure, but the real blessing was this: my wife told me about my son's prayers at dinner. He had bowed his head, said what we always say (he's only just five), 'Dear God, for these and all our blessings make us grateful,' and then, instead of 'Amen' he said, 'and please give Daddy good choices for his dinner.' I had told him about Army food! That little prayer completes a Father's joy. You see, the fact that I'm here and he's there has caused him to take my burdens, and his, to our Father in heaven. That little guy is trying out the Father in Heaven. See, how that works? He's gonna throw his weight toward God in Heaven. And the Good News is, when he tries Him, he will find Him good." Now that little boy is 18, and leaning on Jesus. Don't live to death; die to live in Christ. Share that life with those you love. Complete the Father's joy.

STUDY GUIDE

FROM ME TO WE • EPHESIANS 2:1-10

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

Read the passage for the week: Ephesians 2:1-10. 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.

- What is Paul telling us about God? What do we learn about God and His character in these verses?
- What does Paul want us to see and acknowledge about what we were like before we met Christ?
- According to this passage, what has motivated God to bring us back to life, to save us? Does it make a difference to you what it is that motivates God? Explain your response.
- Throughout Scripture God has emphasized that we should see ourselves as a part of His family. How does Paul encourage the Ephesians to move from "me" to "we" in this passage?
- In your experience, what is the best part of community?
- In your experience, what is the hardest part of community?

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

Who has God placed in your life who needs to be brought into God's community? This may be a person who currently identifies themselves as being outside the family of faith, or it may be a person of faith who is trying to live life on his or her own. Does this person have an awareness of their need for community? What are the openings that God is creating in their life for His family? Begin praying for them.

IN: Connect With the Family of God

Write a letter to someone in the body of Christ this week and drop it in the mail (or send an email). Encourage them with God's word or a prayer you have for them. Let them know they matter in the body of Christ.