

# 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 3:1-13 • John Goodale • July 1, 2018

One of my all-time sports highlights was traveling to Los Angeles in 1984 for the Summer Olympics. I purchased my tickets a year in advance, managing to get a week's worth of events for around \$100. Once I arrived, I discovered a ticket venue and added some additional events. One of the additional events I wanted to see was tennis—but I didn't have a ticket. On the morning of the event, I took the bus to UCLA, walked to the tennis venue—then positioned myself with a sign requesting an extra ticket so I could move from where I was to where I wanted to be.

How often in life do we long to be somewhere different than we are? Perhaps we're unsure how to get there, or are unable to do so on our own. Some of us may long for a more rewarding marriage than we're currently experiencing. Perhaps we long in singleness for friends who will know us more deeply. We may long for better health, greater meaning to our work, greater purpose to our days or better financial security. If you're in school, you may long for greater respect or social standing from other students.

Many of our life choices are prompted by the desire to be in a different place than we are currently. Sometimes we need the help of others in moving from where we are to where we want to be. When it comes to our relationship with God and all He has to offer, we're not able to experience that on our own. Paul's words today tell us how we can.

Our passage opens with a bit of humor. Paul begins with the phrase, "For this reason . . ." (Ephesians 3:1); he's about to say something, prompted by what he just wrote in chapter 2. Before he even finished the sentence, though, Paul interrupted himself and moved in a different direction. This interruption is today's passage; it won't be until 3:14 that he gets back on track by using this same phrase.

Have you ever watched an athletic or artistic performance that left you so amazed and inspired, you found yourself thinking of it again and again, marveling at what you saw or experienced? That's what was going on in this moment for Paul, when he interrupted himself. He was so taken by what he'd just written in chapter 2, Paul felt compelled to linger on it some more.

Last week Tim covered chapter 2's focus on

Jesus' removal of division between Jew and non-Jews, or Gentiles. Paul was so excited about this relational transformation, he returned to this theme in chapter 3. This time Paul uses his own person experience to describe what God had done. He writes of "the administration of God's grace that was given to me" (Ephesians 3:2), "the mystery made known to me" (Ephesians 3:3) and "my insight into the mystery of Christ" (Ephesians 3:4). Then in 3:6 Paul summarizes again God's dramatic movement of His followers from Me to We that he wrote of in chapter 2: "through the gospel, the Gentiles are heirs together with Israel, members together of one body and sharers together in the promise of Christ Jesus." Paul couldn't get over his amazement at not only what God had done, but that he was the messenger of it.

I realize not everyone here is a football fan, but I hope you'll grasp the following: Imagine one of the most avid Denver Broncos fans turning overnight into a Raiders fan. That kind of change doesn't happen; neither does the change Paul experienced in his own life and ministry. When Paul encountered Jesus on the road to Damascus, the church's greatest adversary suddenly became its greatest advocate. In 3:7 Paul attributes this transformation to God's power in his life: "I became a servant of this gospel by the gift of God's grace given me through the working of his power."

Think about this: the power that resurrected Jesus from the dead; the power that transformed Paul from adversary to advocate; the power that brought together Jews and Gentiles who'd been divided for centuries—this same power is available today to you and me. "We" with God provides what just "Me" can't experience. God assures us in II Corinthians that "my power is made perfect in weakness" (II Cor. 12:9). Where in your life today are you feeling weak or vulnerable? Where are you coming up short and could use His power? I encourage you to hold onto whatever comes to mind as we continue with Paul's words in the next verse.

In Ephesians 3:8 Paul refers to "the boundless riches of Christ." The Greek wording used here literally means riches that are too vast to explore; Christ's riches are inexhaustible. Commenting on this verse, John Stott wrote, "Christ never impoverishes those

who follow Him, but immeasurably enriches them.”

We’ve established that Christ’s riches are limitless—but what if we try to put some definition to them? There’s peace; Jesus said “Peace I leave with you, my peace I give you” (John 14:27). There’s unconditional love; Paul writes “I am convinced that (nothing) in all creation will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Romans 8:38-39). There’s constant companionship; Jesus said “I am with you always” (Matthew 28:20). There’s meaningful life; Jesus declared “I have come that they might have life, and have it to the full” (John 10:10). And there’s eternal life; we read, “whoever believes in (Jesus) shall not perish but have eternal life (John 3:16b).

Where do you most need to experience God’s power? In what ways do you long to receive Christ’s riches in your life? Those are important questions, but here’s the big one: When it comes to experiencing God’s power and Christ’s riches in your life, how do you get from where you are to where you want to be? Paul provides an answer in Ephesians 3:12: “In him and through faith in him we may approach God in freedom and confidence.”

A literal translation of this wording in Greek would be: “In (Jesus) we have boldness and access in confidence.” In Jesus, we have bold access to God. Our NIV translates this as “freedom to approach God.” Jesus moves us from where we are to where we want to be in experiencing all God has for our lives. Jesus, Himself, declared, “I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me” (John 14:6).

Let’s pause and note that this is contrary to popular thinking today, isn’t it? We see on bumper stickers and hear elsewhere that there are multiple ways to God, all equally valid. That sounds nice; it feels good. But if that’s your belief, I urge you to examine upon what basis or authority it rests. Is there an underlying foundation beyond simply something we want to believe, so we do?

Admittedly, insisting Jesus is the only way to God sounds a lot more restrictive and narrow-minded. In response, I hope you’ll pardon one more sports analogy. If you’re entering a Broncos game, isn’t it better to use the one valid source of access the team has indicated will get you in—than to bring Colorado College hockey tickets or Pikes Peak Center concert tickets on the assumption anything will work equally well?

A Broncos game and any ticketed event doesn’t work that way; neither does access to God.

It’s not that anyone is trying to arbitrarily limit our access to God; Jesus is literally our only way to get to Him. Imagine having surgery this week, and when the surgeon comes to introduce himself he’s caked from head to toe in mud after making mud-pies with his child that morning. You’d postpone that surgery, because mud and sterile operating environment don’t mix. Neither do our sin and God’s holiness.

We’ve heard a lot of talk lately about a wall. For centuries there was a wall between us and God; erected by our sin. It kept God’s people from fully experiencing Him. God longed so much for relationship with us, He sent Jesus to provide a way to Him. Christ became our access when He tore down the wall erected by our sin, by giving His life on the cross. Only Jesus had the power to deal with our sin; only Jesus can move us from where we are to where we want to be with God.

Some years ago I read of a college logic class that was known for its difficult exams. In an effort to help the students, the professor allowed them to bring an 8 1/2x11 inch piece of paper filled with whatever information seemed of greatest help to them. Students filled their page with all the facts and information they could think of that might be relevant for their test. Except one student. He brought his piece of paper to class, but it was blank. After sitting down, he placed it on the ground—and onto it stepped an Advanced Logic student, who told him all the correct answers. This student was the only one to receive an A on the test!

Imagine holding a piece of paper that represents your access to relationship with God, as well as His power and Christ’s riches. What would be on that paper? Would it be your goodness? Your faithfulness over the years? An assumption that you deserve whatever God has to offer? Friends, the only thing on that proverbial piece of paper that can get us from where we are to where we want to be with God, is Jesus, Himself. When we acknowledge we’re not good enough to approach God on our own and are in need of Jesus’ saving work on the cross, He becomes our access to God, no matter where we’ve been or what we’ve done.

One of our country’s most treasured documents is the Declaration of Independence. This was a dec-

laration that we as a country could stand on our own, independent of England. A Declaration of Independence works great for a nation; it doesn't work so well in our relationship with God. Ours is a declaration of dependence: only in Jesus do we have bold and free access to God.

Fortunately for me that day at the Olympics, someone came along with an extra ticket.

As a result, I was able to enjoy what I couldn't have on my own. Fortunately for us, Jesus came to remove the sin erected wall between us and God, and become our access. As a result, we're able to enjoy personal relationship with God, His power and Christ's riches that we couldn't have on our own.

"In (Jesus) we have bold access to God." Let's celebrate these words—but even more, let's live them out, so we can experience all the blessings of we with God.

## STUDY GUIDE

### FROM ME TO WE • EPHESIANS 3:1-13

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

Read the passage for the week: Ephesians 3:1-13. 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.

- Paul is a prisoner. Why doesn't this simple fact discredit his ministry or his message?
- In Scripture a mystery is not something that cannot be known but something that, although once hidden, has been revealed. What mystery is Paul talking about in verse 3? Is this the same mystery or a different mystery in verse 4?
- In the NIV verse 10 refers to the "manifold wisdom of God." What does "manifold" mean?
- How does including Gentiles in the Body of Christ demonstrate the manifold wisdom of God to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places? How does including the Gentiles demonstrate the power of God?
- What does it mean to approach God with confidence? What would it look like to not have freedom and confidence to approach God?
- On a scale of 1 to 10 (10 being the highest), how free and confident do you feel in approaching God? Reflect on your response.

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

It is no secret that as people, we are more comfortable surrounding ourselves not with the rich variety of God's creation, but with the thin slice that seems most similar to us. Pay attention to the ways people cluster this week. Ask God to open your eyes to the ways He is at work in all the different clusters.

#### **IN:** Connect With the Family of God

Spend some time praying for our church. Pray that we will continue to grow in the wisdom of God together.