

# 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.

Long live variety. When I was growing up, my grandmother used to have a saying. When I said I didn't like something, she'd say, "Well, that's why God made chocolate and vanilla." If you don't like vanilla ice cream, you can eat chocolate ice cream. We have both, so that covers everybody. Do you know why she said that? Because chocolate and vanilla were the only two flavors of ice cream out there! That was it! I mean you might get strawberry, but if you had any idea how many Neapolitan ice cream tubs we threw away with the strawberry third still in there, you'd gasp. But then came Baskin-Robbins. Thirty-one flavors! Then they put cookie dough in the ice cream! This, for me, was bigger than the moon landing. On it went. Now I hear a shop in New Jersey has invented ham flavored ice cream—pork roll flavor to be precise. To which I say, finally! It's about time! Thank God, people were a little more creative than chocolate and vanilla. Do you know why they were more creative? Because they were made by a creative God. The same God who furnished creation with over 18,000 species of birds; the same God who, if you hold up a dime to the night sky it covers more than 15 million stars behind it, that's how many stars He put up there; that same God made you and me, in His image. We weren't going to settle for chocolate and vanilla. We were made by a super-creative God. A God who loves variety and sees beauty in diversity. Now, when it comes to building His church...

The Scriptures we read have lists of qualities and gifts, backgrounds and cultures, languages and races, all coming together to build this one, ornate, beautiful temple to the Lord. And to these various different people, when the church comes together, God also gives particular spiritual gifts to each one for the sake of the church and its mission. Maybe you have studied spiritual gifts before. These are not things we are born with—it seems to be different from natural skills or talents. These are gifts God gives the church by His Spirit, giving them to each individual believer, that we are supposed to use together to get the best benefit. Well, all the lists, if you study them, are a little different. Some people say, "OK add up all the different lists and the sum is the total of possible spiritual gifts." I'm not sure. I think it may be a way that God is telling us there's a lot of variety, but when it all comes together, watch out!

God has a plan for His church. It's a body with many parts doing many different things. So long as every part is only "me" nothing can happen, but if all the parts are willing to be "we"... watch out! This body is on the move. As Pastor Andy Stanley says, this only works "When every part does its part." Church is a body. A body is nobody until everybody gets involved. So we talk today about Ephesians 4:1-16, we talk today about being the church. God equips His church for His purposes. You have a gift to bring. You are, and you have, something for this body that nobody else can bring. A body is nobody until everybody gets involved. I'm going to break this passage down into three parts for you today. We are going to talk about (1) the qualities of the body, (2) the leaders of the body and (3) the tasks of the body.

**The Qualities of the Body:** We get a picture here of what this body is like. We get a little list, don't we? Look at verse two: "Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love" (Ephesians 4:2). *Humility* is not self-abasement or low self-esteem. Humility is submitting yourself to God, not thinking of yourself too highly or as more important than others. Humility is to not expect to be treated any better—certainly not any better than Jesus. Think of how humble Jesus was, the Son of God. The first quality of the body is humility. Be gentle it says. *Gentleness*. It's one of the fruit of the Spirit. Where has gentleness gone? It used to be one of the chief attributes of genuine masculinity—"That man is such a *gentleman*." Young women, you are looking for a gentleman. One who uses what power he has thoughtfully, carefully, with regard for others. Men, you're looking for a gentle woman. "*Be patient*" it says. Take a minute, you know? Hang in with one another, and bear with one another in love. *Carry one another's burdens*. I was once talking with a man who converted to Christianity from an honor society, where men are measured by their contribution and held to account for any failure with public shame. He said to me, "I promise I will never be a burden to you or the church. I swear I will only add; I will never detract. I will not be a liability." "Well," I said, "then you can't join the church. We are all blessings and liabilities to one another. If you won't bring your burdens, we can't be the church." Bear with one another.

There is *unity* in the body. “Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to one hope when you were called; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all” (Ephesians 4:3-6). There is unity. But you get to appreciate the unity because you clearly see the diversity. That’s how it works. It’s not sameness; it’s unity. Differences coming together, and a huge variety of gifts: “But to each one of us grace has been given as Christ apportioned it. This is why it says: ‘When he ascended on high, he took many captives and gave gifts to his people’” (Ephesians 4:7-8), which is Paul taking Psalm 68:18 and turning it around to make a point. The Psalm says the Lord went up the mountain to receive gifts, but Paul, in the Spirit, flips it—he went up and captured gifts to shower down on us. The point is we are all different and we all get different gifts, but we bring them together in one body, one spirit, one faith for the one mission. These are the *qualities* of the body.

Now we get **The Leaders of the Body**. “So Christ himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, to equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up” (Ephesians 4:11-12). These are five types of leader every healthy church should have and celebrate: *Apostles*, sent ones able to carry the message into new territory and break new ground. *Prophets*, not future-seers but those able to apply the Scriptures to current situations and challenges. *Evangelists*. We think of street-corner preaching. Not necessarily. Let me tell you an old definition of an evangelist—one who presents the *evangel*, the good news of what Jesus has done. One way to define an evangelist is a person who tells what Jesus has done and declares Him worthy of praise. *Pastors*. You know this bunch: invisible six days a week and incomprehensible on the seventh. *Teachers*. These are our leaders. And how do they lead? They serve to equip. They serve in their capacities to equip the body to do works of service. Who serves the Lord? The pastor? We all serve—but mostly you! I serve to equip you to do the works God has given us to do as a church.

**The Tasks of the Body**. What is it, by the way, we are supposed to do? Well, we are certainly

meant to do the work of worship. Worship, prayer, praise to God offered weekly in our city. This is our task. We are sent on mission to the world, every believer. “Therefore go and make disciples of all nations” (Matthew 28:19), Jesus said to His disciples. But here it is not so much what we are supposed to *do* as what we are supposed to *become*. We have to be what the church *is* before we can do what the church *does*. It says we must become mature. We must grow up in Christ. “...become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ. Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of people in their deceitful scheming” (Ephesians 4:13-14). We are to grow up, to help one another grow up in Christ, to become mature Christian disciples. Not tossed around like a cork on the sea with every passing philosophy, fad or idea. Rooted in Christ. Steeped in the Scriptures. Solid.

Speaking truth in love to one another it says. “Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will grow to become in every respect the mature body of him who is the head, that is, Christ” (Ephesians 4:15). Speaking the truth in love. Do you know, sometimes people speak the truth but not in love? What does it mean to speak the truth in love? This is one of our markers for Life Groups—that we trust one another enough to speak the Scriptures (the truth) to one another in a way that, if you told me some Scripture to apply to my life, I would trust that you have my best interest at heart—even if it was a hard word for me to hear.

The task of the body is to grow. We are to grow up, to grow stronger, to grow bigger, to grow more mature, healthier—all together. “We will grow to become in every respect the mature body of him who is the head, that is, Christ. From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work” (Ephesians 4:15-16). Here’s where I want you to see: we are going to grow, and we can’t do it alone. We can only do this together. We are bound together, like a body. One body with one spirit. One life. But a body is nobody until everybody participates. Every part must do its part. If you’ve been going to church a while, you’ve heard warm sermons about every part being valuable, and that’s right. But let me take it one step further. On the neg-

ative side. If you don't do what you are supposed to do, I can't do what I'm supposed to do. Christ is building a body here. We are tied together. So come on! Get on board. If you sit still and refuse to get your gift up and running, I can't go anywhere either! We're bound up together. So let's go. Let's go on. God's got great stuff for us to do, church!

We had some great examples of everybody in the body this week at Vacation Bible School. Ellie Lark is a middle schooler building into younger kids. Tom Slack was with 23 fourth graders; it was Tom's first time teaching VBS. Georgeann Hughes and Nancy Wilson are experts. VBS is a week where the whole church gets down on its knees at kid level to say "Jesus loves you." It can't happen alone. What a perfect example. That's the beauty of the whole body being the body.

So to close, let's go all the way back up to verse one. This whole thing starts with this line: "As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received" (Ephesians 4:1). "Worthy" here is connected to the word "axis" like bringing both sides of an axis up to equal height. Equal. It says, hey, you've been called. Christ has named you, called you to be a part of this. Let your character come up to the level of your calling. Live into it. Why? Well, Paul starts this whole appeal with "as a prisoner for the Lord." He's in chains. But more than Roman chains, he's chained to the Lord. He's bound to the Lord Jesus. He's bound to the body of Christ, and he's not upset about that. A chain that binds you to Jesus is not a painful, heavy chain. It's more like a wedding ring or a friendship bracelet—it's a joy! But it is binding. We are bound together as one body, under one Head, our one Lord Jesus Christ. The one Spirit is like sinews and ligaments and tendons holding us together. There isn't one of us who deserves to be part of the Body of Christ—on earth or in heaven! But He has bound Himself to us anyway. He wants you, He accepts you, in fact, He gave His life on the Cross to bring you in. So jump in. Let your actions come up to your salvation; let your gratitude rise to your grace; let your character match your calling, and watch what Jesus does with His Body the church.

## STUDY GUIDE

### FROM ME TO WE • EPHESIANS 4:1-16

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

Read the passage for the week: Ephesians 4:1-16. 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 has just written "Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever. Amen" (Ephesians 3:20-21). Why do you think he follows that with, "I beg you to lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called."? Is there a connection between the power at work within us and leading a life worthy of the calling?
- What elements of the life that we have been called to might require more power than we have on our own?
- What adjectives does Paul list to describe how we are to live? What about those words imply that he does not think of this life being one lived in solitude?
- "One body," "one Spirit," "one hope," "one faith," "one baptism." How are these made evident in your life? Are there ways in which these don't seem true for you?
- Can you think of people you know who are examples of each of the Leaders listed? Do you identify with one of these more than the others?

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

As each part does its part, what difference could the church make in the world?

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

What gifts do you think the Lord has given you for the good of the church? What part do you have to play in the body of Christ?

What gifts do you see in others around you?

Spend some time praying for First Pres. Pray that every member of the body would fully live into his or her gifts for the building up of the church.