

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 4:17-32 • Tim McConnell • July 22, 2018

My brother Rob is a pillar of his church in southern Colorado, a reliable leader in his community and a successful financial advisor many rely on for sound counsel and solid advice. When he was a teenager, he went through kind of a rock star, heavy metal stage. It was an AC/DC and Ozzy Osbourne kind of thing. Rob wore a leather jacket that whole time, a black, zippered leather jacket with chains and studs in it. The jacket itself had a kind of personality, a kind of air to it. I wondered if it was possessed. I thought maybe if we could get ahold of that jacket and burn it maybe we wouldn't have to listen to so much Ozzy! But he always wore it. I think he slept in it. I remember going to the pool, and here comes Rob, flip-flops, colorful floral bathing suit and that thick black leather jacket poolside in 85-degree heat. I didn't have a leather jacket. I had an oversized, acid-washed jean jacket to make me cool. As you can see, it didn't work. Eventually, as the Lord restored, redeemed, rearranged my brother's life and poured new life into him, the jacket went away. What do you need to put down so you can take up what Christ has for you? What do you need to take off and throw away to put on what Jesus has for you? What are you breaking away from right now? What is clinging to you so tightly you think you can never be rid of it? Jesus is done with that. You're done with that. Put down the old; new life has come.

We are walking through Ephesians this summer, a letter to the church in Ephesus, asking how it teaches us to move from "me" to "we." We have seen how God is in control in ways that are beyond our understanding, how Christ is our head and we are His body joined by His power to destroy every division. We have heard how the grace of God brings us out of death and into life and how the Spirit of Christ equips the church for its mission. Now comes the question, a question we raised last week when Paul challenged the community in Ephesus to bring their character up to their calling: are you going to live this new life out, or leave it to rot on the vine? You have been named righteous by your faith in Christ, you have been adopted into God's household. 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 2:6). This has all been done. It's all yours. You are saved, you are named a child of God, you are guaranteed eternal life. Are you going to live like that? Or are you going to walk back into your old ways? What do you need to put down to take up new life in Christ?

"So I tell you this, and insist on it in the Lord, that you must no longer live as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their thinking" (Ephesians 4:17). There is a life you once lived that you cannot live anymore. There is a way you once thought that you cannot think anymore. I must

insist, in the Lord, that you put away the old way of life you once knew and leave behind that worthless way of thinking. Look at how useless and painful it is: "They are darkened in their understanding and separated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them due to the hardening of their hearts" (Ephesians 4:18). Futile thinking, darkened understanding, separated from the life of God, hardened of heart. Now that's not something God did to them, it's the result of their own sin and disobedience. The Puritans used to say "the same sun that melts the ice hardens the clay." God just sheds His light on us. If we would follow what light came our way by God's hand, we would get softer toward God. But when we turn away from Him, we get hardened. Callused.

Look at verse 19: "Having lost all sensitivity, they have given themselves over to sensuality so as to indulge in every kind of impurity, and they are full of greed" (Ephesians 4:19). This is a powerful verse. And sad. It says it's possible to lose sensitivity. You can grow numb. Drug addicts tell about the swift decline into self-destruction. At first, the drug gives a high. Then to get the same feeling, more and more is needed. To get the same high you have to take more of the drug because your body is used to it. And the more you take, the more damage is being done and the more deeply-rooted the addiction gets, and soon you are on the edge of an overdose. It's not only drugs that are like this. Your soul can get this way toward just about anything. At first a little of it satisfied, but then you needed more and more and more. Ever-increasing need with ever-diminishing return. Before you know it you are living with an aching hunger inside that never seems to be satisfied. You are eaten up with greed. "Full of greed" it says. That's not just about money, it's about the empty feeling, the vacuum of need in the heart. Soon you are full of emptiness; riddled with unquenchable thirst, with unsatisfiable appetites, impossible demands.

Last month we all watched and prayed as teams of experts struggled to rescue twelve Thai boys and their coach stuck in a flooded cave system in Thailand. Sadly, one hero had to give his life to rescue them. They were in the cave, in the dark, for nine days before rescue workers first found them. One of the first questions the boys asked was, "What day is it?" They were lost for so long, in the dark for so long, they lost all sense of time and the passage of day and night. That's a material, physical illustration of what Paul is saying can happen to us spiritually. You can get totally disoriented, fogged over in your mind and soul, unable to perceive God's light. Something that used to prick your conscience now seems normal. I'm used to it now, you think. Stuff we see on television or movies or video games that once shocked us is now commonplace, and producers have to come up with more and more levels of shocking visuals to even get our attention. Anytime

we set our hearts on unsatisfying things, we get sucked into this soul vortex, like a black hole with enormous gravity slowly drawing us into the void.

"That, however, is not the way of life you learned when you heard about Christ and were taught in him in accordance with the truth that is in Jesus" (Ephesians 4:20-21). Listen carefully now. It isn't just that you learned *about* Christ. It isn't that you heard something *of* Christ. It's that you were *IN* Christ. What does that mean? Well, it means you don't just know what Jesus did, you believe and trust in what Jesus did. In fact, you bet your life on it. God sent His Son Jesus Christ to be God with us. Jesus died to bring us home from where we were stuck in the void and darkness of our lives turned away from His light. Now, when you believe in Jesus, when you trust in Jesus, you are not just a follower of, you are not just a student to; you are *IN* Christ. Supernaturally united with Him. And when your life is in Christ, it is totally different than this desperate search to fill the void you've been after.

Coming to Jesus is not tossing your soul into a vortex of ever-increasing hunger and ever-decreasing satisfaction. Jesus is that which satisfies. Jesus is the Lord and Author of Life. Jesus is actually worthy of praise and adoration, worthy of glory and worship, and able to keep your life in the grip of His mighty hands. When once your heart is set upon Jesus, you have found life. This is what Blaise Pascal meant when he said there is a God-shaped hole in every heart. This is what Augustine meant when he prayed, "Lord, You have made us for Yourself, and our hearts are restless until they find their rest in You." Jesus satisfies the void. He fills you. He places His Holy Spirit within you. Look at this from John 7: "On the last and greatest day of the festival, Jesus stood and said in a loud voice, 'Let anyone who is thirsty come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as Scripture has said, rivers of living water will flow from within them'" (John 7:37-38). Jesus means the Spirit. Coming to Jesus with thirst means finally being satisfied. That's what you learned when you were in Christ. That's what you learned when you came to Jesus. You learned that when you finally get home to Jesus Christ, the void ends, fullness comes, eternal life begins. That's how the rest of the passage makes any sense at all. An empty heart can become a fountain of love; a thief who only took can become a resource and supply to others. This is what you learned, Paul is saying, when you were saved in Jesus Christ. That's what you learned—the search is over. Life has been found.

"The poor and needy search for water, but there is none; their tongues are parched with thirst. But I the Lord will answer them; I, the God of Israel, will not forsake them. I will make rivers flow on barren heights,

and springs within the valleys. I will turn the desert into pools of water, and the parched ground into springs" (Isaiah 41:17-18). Now that you have found Christ the answer, now that the aching void has become an internal fountain of new life and the place of thirst has become an overflowing source of living water, now...will you live like it? What will you put down to take up new life in Christ?

I want to emphasize this point. The rest of what I say, and the rest of what you will hear as we get toward the end of this letter, Ephesians, is for believers. The quickest way to get crushed is to try to live the Christian life without the life of Christ within you. If you are not a believer, if you are not in Christ, you will not have the power to experience the kind of transformation on offer here. You cannot on your own, by sheer will, force the void of your heart to become a spring of living water. Only God can do that. But if you are in Christ, your call now is to put off the old and take up the new. What do you need to put down to take up new life in Christ? "You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; to be made new in the attitude of your minds; and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness" (Ephesians 4:22-24). When you found Jesus to be the answer to your questions and the satisfaction of your deepest thirsts, what were you taught? By finding Jesus you were taught that the old ways are not going to get you where your soul needs to go. You were taught that your old pursuits and old efforts to quench the thirst or fill the void were no good. You were taught to put off your old self, which, when your deceitful desires were in charge, was being corrupted and ruined by the whole process. Put off that stuff so you can pick up the new life Jesus has for you.

What are we going to put off? Again, this is for those who are in Christ. Just keep the passage open and I'm going to list some things we read here. We are going to put off, to walk away from: ignorance (verse 18), impure self-indulgence (verse 19). (Mercifully, I don't have time to dig into any of these). We are going to drop falsehood and lying (verse 25), resentment and anger—we are going to resolve anger in the day, not let it fester. Stealing (verse 28) and foul language (verse 30). These things corrupt and corrode, they grieve the Holy Spirit within us, and they give the devil a foothold in our lives he can use to steal, kill and destroy. We don't force ourselves to change these things in some effort to be morally superior or to win the favor of God. God has already given us His favor freely—it's proven in Jesus His Son. We drop these things because they're no good, and we see that now.

We drop these old things so we can take up new life. What are we taking up? Verse 24, godliness, true

righteousness and holiness. God pours those things into us. Truthfulness (verse 25). Productive work and dignity (verse 28). Edifying talk, kindness, compassion, forgiveness and mercy—these things don't create emptiness and regret, they fill us up and give us ultimate peace, ultimate satisfaction. They don't corrode our souls; they start to help our souls grow to be who we were truly meant to be when we were made in the image of God. But it doesn't happen instantly. It's a process. I had a friend come to Christ in church some years back. He and his wife and his two sons were baptized all together. Soon they felt God calling them to adopt from China and they adopted a sweet girl. About a year and a half into things, my friend came up to me at a men's retreat and said, "Tim, I'm so happy to be at home with Christ. My whole life is different, but I'm wondering if I'm doing something wrong." "What do you mean?" "Well," he said, "I still sin. I don't know why, but I still sin sometimes." Yup. Me too. It's a process, this holiness bit. Salvation happens like that. But holiness, becoming who God made you to be—it's a lifelong project and then some. But I said to him, the difference now is that when you sin you know it, and you confess it, and you don't just bumble along in corrosive and self-destructive behavior. The Holy Spirit is in you. And you know there is something better for you than holding on to these old, unsatisfying patterns.

God puts His Holy Spirit in you when you put your faith in His Son Jesus. The hunger and void stop driving you desperately to false and deceitful desires, but it takes a while for all the cracks and crevices to fill and know the healing touch of the Spirit. Think of that cave system in Thailand. What would it take to fill that up with clear, clean water and wash every cavern clean? It takes time. Sometimes you think you're there, when the Spirit finds a whole new cavern, a whole new branch you never knew was there that has to be filled, healed, cleaned. But God won't quit on you. He owns you. You are His child. Your holiness is on the way, but your salvation is already here. You are not being cleaned up for heaven or washed up for church. No. Your sins are forgiven and you are known as righteous and holy, justified by faith in Christ who died for you. Live into your salvation. Put down the old, worthless things. Pick up the new. There is new life in Jesus Christ.

STUDY GUIDE

FROM ME TO WE • EPHESIANS 4:17-32

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

Read the passage for the week: Ephesians 4:17-32. 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 calling the Christians in Ephesus to break from their former way of living. Paul says, "You must no longer live as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their thinking." What about the Gentiles' thinking is futile? What is Paul talking about?
- How does the darkened understanding lead to the life of sensuality described in this passage?
- What are the differences between the old self and the new self?
- In describing the way we ought to live together, Paul begins his list by requiring us to "put off falsehood and speak truthfully." Why is that first?
- God is at work in your life right now! Key to our discipleship is surrender. What do you need to "let go" of or "put down" in your life right now in order to take hold of what Christ has for you?

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

If community is so vital for our walk with Christ, our ability to become like Him, being lonely is not only a social concern, but a spiritual one. How can you reach out to someone who is isolated and invite them in? Think of one person that you can connect with in the coming week.

IN: Connect With the Family of God

Ask the Lord to bring people to your mind and then spend some time praying for other members of First Pres. Pray that as a church we would know the grace and power of the Lord at work in our lives and in the life of our community.