

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 5:1-20 • Tim McConnell • July 29, 2018

Are you awake? I heard a pastor say he was never insulted when someone fell asleep during worship. He figured they needed the rest! He was glad they found it in the comfort of church. Well, I'm not insulted... but I do want to wake you up. My son Jack leaves for college next month. His roommate is a friend from high school here and we all went camping together in June. His roommate, Max, and his dad were talking about how Max doesn't wake up very well. He's been known to sleep through his alarm. He's been known to walk across the room and turn off the alarm and go back to bed without ever really waking up. He's been known to wake up in various places in the house without remembering how he got there! It reminded me of one of my college roommates who didn't wake up easily. The alarm would go off all morning until I turned it off. We had lofted beds and I had the bright idea to put his alarm up in the loft right next to his head. But it still didn't wake him, so I had to climb over him, in tight quarters, to reach his alarm. It made for a few interesting mornings. It's tough to wake up.

It's tough to stay awake. I'm always impressed by those movies where someone has to stay up all night on a stakeout, just waiting and watching. How do they do it? There's a lot of coffee involved, but doesn't that mean a lot of trips to the...somewhere? Never mind. It's tough to stay awake. Jesus tells us to stay awake. Slumber is used in the Bible as an image of spiritual confusion. It's a place of spiritual vulnerability. On the day that He was arrested, Jesus told His followers a parable about staying awake. He said there were ten young women in a bridal party waiting with oil lamps to see the bridegroom, but after a while, their lamps went out. "The bridegroom was a long time in coming, and they all became drowsy and fell asleep" (Matthew 25:5). They weren't prepared to wait and watch for the Lord. "Therefore keep watch, [Jesus said] because you do not know the day or the hour" (Matthew 25:13). Then, after the Last Supper, Jesus went into the garden of Gethsemane to pray in agony, and He asked His disciples to stay up and pray for Him when He went. But they all fell asleep. So Jesus told them, "Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak" (Matthew 26:41). Stake awake. It's hard to stay awake.

Today, Paul challenges the church at Ephesus to stay awake. Wake up and stay awake. He had already told them they were dead earlier in the letter, so telling them they are asleep at the switch isn't all that bad. It's kind of an improvement. But the challenge is to

stay awake. To live thoughtfully and carefully. Not to just wander into whatever life brings next, but to walk ahead in wisdom with Jesus as your guide and your light. "Follow God's example, therefore, as dearly loved children and walk in the way of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God" (Ephesians 5:1-2). This is what you might call a "walk along" sermon this morning. I need you to walk along with me through it, and you won't really get the point until the end. But let me give you some signposts. Here's where we are headed: Our call is to walk the way of love, not the way of consuming which leads to darkness, but the way of giving that becomes light and life; to do this we must stay awake and live carefully; and, finally, you can't stay awake alone.

Walk the way of love. Our model is God. We are challenged to follow God's example, to be like Christ Jesus, Who, in love "gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God." But the self-giving way of love can easily flip over to the consuming way of lust. Don't let that happen, Paul says. All this talk in verses 3 to 7, these are ways we use others to benefit ourselves; we consume others to try to fill ourselves. This isn't the Kingdom way. Don't do it, and don't listen to those who try to change your mind about what is right and wrong in God's sight. In verse 6: "let no one deceive you with empty words." People will not only pursue self-gratifying lusts but they will want to argue that these things are right. Hold fast to the Scriptures. Forgiveness is open to all. The wrath of God against disobedience is poured out on Jesus Christ, His own Son, on the cross at Calvary. The wrath is satisfied and so, in Christ, there is no limit of forgiveness. Don't go along with those who deceive. That direction only leads to darkness.

"For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light (for the fruit of the light consists in all goodness, righteousness and truth)" (Ephesians 5:8-9). You know what's in the darkness. You've been there yourself. Don't participate in spreading darkness. Turn to the light. Jesus said, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life" (John 8:12). Jesus is the light; Jesus is the life. To walk with Him in His light is to participate in bringing light and life to the broken and fallen and confused world. It's to join in His mission. The fruit of light is goodness, righteousness and truth—good things stitching together and healing a fractured and splintered and wounded world. In fact, everything you bring to the light of Christ becomes

light and life. Verse 13: "But everything exposed by the light becomes visible—and everything that is illuminated becomes a light" (Ephesians 5:13). Even dark things, dark wounds, dark and regretful parts of your life—in Christ's hands, they can become lights. Vehicles for the light of Christ to shine.

Walk the way of love, not the way of consuming which leads to darkness, but the way of giving that becomes light and life. "This is why it is said: 'Wake up, sleeper, rise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you'" (Ephesians 5:14). Quick note for the margin of your Bible: Paul didn't write, "So it is written" to indicate this is a direct quote of Scripture. There are a few verses that sound like this, but it's not a quote. He wrote, "That's why it says." That's why what says? We don't know. But a lot of scholars think it was a liturgical prayer or even a praise song the whole church knew well. Praise song gets my bet, because of where the passage goes next. Wake up, sleeper. Wake up. Rise from the dead. Don't sleep your life away into darkness; wake up to the light of Christ.

That's hard to do alone. To walk the way of love and not give in to the way of consuming, but to follow Christ's example into the way of giving, to stay out of darkness and walk in light, to become light, to share light, that's not easy—and it's nothing to try alone. You have to stay awake. You have to stay alert. Stay alert; stay alive. You need at least one buddy. Paul says, "Be very careful, then, how you live—not as unwise but as wise, making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil. Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the Lord's will is" (Ephesians 5:15-17). Stay awake. Don't just drift along down the river of life. Keep alert. Stay thoughtful and wise, finding the way God has for you, understanding what the will of the Lord is. Socrates said, "The unexamined life is not worth living." There's some of that here in Ephesians. It eventually gets down to some brass tacks behavioral stuff. We will get even more of that next week, so be ready! It says, "Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead be filled with the Spirit" (Ephesians 6:18). We at First Pres are not among those Christians who reject alcohol entirely. Jesus turned water into wine. But drunkenness is not the way to go. If you want to be spirited, be spirited in the Holy Spirit! Don't get drunk, just sing like you're drunk in the joy of the Spirit! "Speaking to one another with psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit. Sing and make music from your heart to the Lord" (Ephesians 5:19).

But here's what you might have missed. All of that, all of those injunctions, they are not issued to individuals but to all of us, to the church all together. "Be very

careful, then, how you live." That's a command to a group, not an individual. It's in the second person plural for you grammarians. It's not "you;" it's "y'all." This isn't something for you to sit alone in your workshop in the basement and try to work out. This is something to work out together, in community. I might have careful days and I might have not-so-careful days. You might have careful days and not-so-careful days. But together, leaning on one another, keeping one another awake, challenging one another when we consume what destroys, encouraging one another when we need to think more about the use of our time, using language with one another not to break each other down but to build each other up, we might just get a few steps under us walking the way of God. Walking the way of love together. Not in the way of consuming that leads to darkness; but in the way of giving that brings light and life in Christ. To do this we need to stay awake. It's hard to stay awake alone.

So, today's the day. If Ephesians is about moving from Me to We, then today's the day. Outside, up and down the hall, at the Welcome Center and Info Alcove, and you online church, on our website—it's all prepared for you to take a next step. Are you in a small circle of believers? One in which you all know one another by name. One in which you pray for one another meaningfully. One in which you trust one another to speak Scripture into one another's lives. One in which you are trying to live out the Christian life together and walk the way of love. Are you? If so: God bless you! I'm glad. If not: Your next step is right outside those doors. Abigail and I are joining a group too. That's a challenge for us in a few different ways. But it's a good challenge. A right challenge. Godly things take up some room, but they tend to push out less than godly things. This is a gift God has for you, friends. Community is a gift. What good is a gift you never open?

Dietrich Bonhoeffer is one of my spiritual heroes. He died at only thirty-nine years old, executed by the Nazis for his actions as a pastor in Germany. The Nazis even took over the church, you know, and people had to push back. Bonhoeffer put together an underground seminary to train pastors to resist the cultural forces pushing people off the Gospel of Jesus Christ and over onto the "gospel" of National Socialism. In that seminary, he started realizing the power and the importance of real, genuine Christian community. He wrote a book called *Life Together*. He said, "Life together is again being understood by Christians today as the grace that it is, as the extraordinary aspect, the 'roses and lilies' of

the Christian life.” Why? Because not only is it so easy for us to drift with culture when we are isolated from other Christians, but it’s easy for us to forget the forgiveness and grace found in Jesus.

One of the most powerful bits of this book for me is where he talks about dealing with our sins together. See, the real gift is not trying to be holy together. We don’t really get to be holy together—not this side of heaven anyway. The real gift is when we can be sinners together. “In confession there takes place a breakthrough to community. Sin wants to be alone with people. It takes them away from the community. The more lonely people become, the more destructive the power of sin over them. The more deeply they become entangled in it, the more unholy is their loneliness. Sin wants to remain unknown. It shuns the light. In the darkness of what is left unsaid sin poisons the whole being of a person. This can happen in the midst of a pious community. In confession the light of the gospel breaks into the darkness and closed isolation of the heart. Sin must be brought into the light.” Bonhoeffer says until we share our sins and struggles with one another, we might think we are confessing alone to God, but we are actually just forgiving ourselves. In other believers, in bringing dark things to light, that’s where we really see and know the grace and forgiveness of Jesus Christ. When we are seen, and known, we are free to be sinners together, forgiven and loved by God.

Do you have anybody in your life like that? If sin can’t destroy you it at least wants to get you alone. Are you walking in the way of love with others to help keep you awake? If the devil can’t kill you, he at least wants to put you to sleep. Are you living your life or is your life living you? Are you walking faithfully, thoughtfully, carefully, wisely, or are you just drifting in and out of whatever happens; letting whatever happens to you just happen? This is a call to walk carefully through life, wakeful, alert. But it isn’t something you do alone. Sometimes there are alert lights on the dashboard of my car or strange noises the engine makes. I get used to them. Maybe turn up the radio. But when a friend gets in the car and sees them, I think about them again. Maybe I better get that checked out, before the transmission falls out on the highway. There is a gift in *together*. The Christian walk is something we do together. Not alone. Alone you’ll just fall asleep—and who will wake you up? Together. Life together. This is a grace. This is a gift from God.

STUDY GUIDE

FROM ME TO WE • EPHESIANS 5:1-20

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

Read the passage for the week: Ephesians 5:1-20. 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 does it mean to walk in the way of love?
- Re-read Ephesians 5:8-10. What is the Apostle Paul saying about the Ephesians? How do these verses motivate them (and us) to take hold of the new life that is ours in Christ?
- In your own words, what does it mean to live wisely? Who do you know that walks in wisdom?
- Why is it so hard to stay awake alone?
- In your life right now, where might the Lord be calling you to “wake up?”

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

Make the most of every opportunity. Consider where you spend the majority of your time. Who do you notice that God has placed around you? What opportunities for doing good do you see there? Write down a few things that you notice and spend some time in the coming week reflecting on the opportunities around you. Ask the Lord to lead you in these opportunities.

IN: Connect With the Family of God

Who around you helps you stay awake?

Spend some time praying for the community that you are a part of. If you don’t have a smaller community, spend some time praying for how the Lord might direct you to community.