

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 6:10-6:24 • Tim McConnell • August 12, 2018

Well, there you go! That's Ephesians. We have read every verse, every word together this summer. Last week we left the easy stuff to Pastors John and Katie! They did a great job with a difficult passage. This week we talk about the battle. Here's a quick test, see if you can fill in the blank: Never bring a knife to a _____. Game Show. That's right. No, "gun fight." See, you did know it. There is still some Colorado frontiersman spirit among us yet. I'm not sure what others would do. Would a Texan know what to do? I think they'd just drive their giant pickup through the battlefield. A Californian might bring something else; maybe an avocado or some white wine. At least in Colorado we know what to do. I hope you never have to know what to bring to a gun fight. For those who do need to know, we pray for their wisdom and safety, as we are praying for officer Cem Duzel who was shot in the line of duty last week, for his steady recovery. Scripture says we are in a battle. Not a battle with flesh and blood, but a spiritual battle. You *are* in a battle. Do you know it? The worst possible position to be in is to be in a battle and not be aware that you are in a battle. Do you know the battle is on? Are you aware of forces amassed against you, against your family? I joke that pastoring a church feels at times like leading a cruise ship into battleship waters. Does everybody know the war is engaged? The church is in a battle, but the battle we are in is a battle we can win.

"Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power" (Ephesians 6:10). It comes down to this: be strong in the Lord. God who is strong wants you to walk in strength, in the strength of His mighty power. Do you ever feel outmatched? Not strong enough to keep going? God, Who is strong, wants you to walk in His strength. People will say, "God never gives you more than you can handle." That's not in the Bible; and it just isn't true. In this life you will regularly face more than you can handle, but you don't face it alone. You face it with God, in the strength of His mighty power. He knows what you are facing, and He knows what strength it will take to endure it, and He provides—not strength for the whole war, but strength for the battle, strength for the day. Lean on Him. The battle we are in is a battle we can win.

It is a spiritual battle. Look at verse 12: "For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms" (Ephesians 6:12). That's why I ask: are you aware that you are in a battle? It's a spiritual battle. Not just flesh and blood. We struggle against rulers and authorities and power structures in this world. I'm going to say this very quickly then

move on and let you think about it. We live in a world that pushes other people over for power; a kill-and-take world. Cain killed his brother Abel and spilled his blood and founded a city; Romulus killed his brother Remus and spilled his brother's blood to found the city of Rome, but Jesus poured out His own blood to establish the City of God. These invisible forces push you away from the way of Jesus. If you are not aware of them, you are in a battle you can't possibly win.

But that's not all. We struggle against forces in this world, but also against spiritual forces of darkness, in the heavenly realms, in invisible places where angels and demons are in constant combat over your soul. I understand that may weird some of you out, but there is so much more to life than the material plane and much of the battle that is being waged—most of the battle that is being waged—is being waged on the spiritual level. As Shakespeare had Hamlet say: "There are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio, than are dreamt of in your philosophy." There is a lot more to life than just flesh and blood. But spiritual things are spiritually discerned. Paul wrote in another letter: "The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned" (1 Corinthians 2:14 ESV). Have you ever found yourself trying to explain your relationship with Jesus to a friend who only sees the material world? They think you're nuts. You might as well be talking about your imaginary friend. They're not open to spiritual things. But for those who are open to the Spirit, spiritual things can be understood. Spiritual things are spiritually discerned. If you do accept the existence of a spiritual plane, who do you want guiding and protecting and defending you in this realm but the Lord of Hosts, God Almighty, the "God of Angel Armies?" You enter the fight a little differently when you have that kind of strength behind you. The battle we are in is a battle we can win.

Be strong in the Lord, and take up the armor of God. "Therefore put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand" (Ephesians 6:13). Not "if" but "when" the day of evil comes, you can stand. Verse 14: "Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place" (Ephesians 6:14). *Truth* is the belt; it holds everything up. We buckle truth around our waist. Ever worn a loose pair of pants without a belt? It takes a lot of energy to keep from getting embarrassed! The only real power the evil one has is deception. The devil traffics in lies; we live in truth. The breastplate is *righteousness*. It protects the heart. Your heart is vulnerable when you are accused of your sins, but we have a righteousness

not our own, purchased for us by Jesus Christ. The accuser cannot penetrate to the heart any longer.

“And with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace” (Ephesians 6:15). Our boots are *ready to share the gospel* of Jesus Christ. We have feet leaning forward, ready, poised to move toward any and all to share the good news of what God has done in Jesus Christ His Son to restore our relationship with Him and bring us into eternal life. It is good news of peace found in Jesus. “In addition to all this, take up the *shield of faith*, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one” (Ephesians 6:16 emphasis added). When the accuser slips into your consciousness, rest on faith in Christ. Martin Luther said, “So when the devil throws your sins in your face and declares that you deserve death and hell, tell him this: ‘I admit that I deserve death and hell, what of it? For I know One who suffered and made satisfaction on my behalf. His name is Jesus Christ, Son of God, and where He is there I shall be also!’” Verse 17: “Take the *helmet of salvation* and the *sword of the Spirit*, which is the word of God” (Ephesians 6:17 emphasis added). The helmet protects the head, where your knowledge is kept. Do you understand your salvation? Do you know and can you articulate how Christ has saved your soul? Finally, the sword we carry is the Word of God—the Bible. It should be as comfortable in your hand as a glove. Who did sword drills as a kid? All of these things, as is often pointed out, are worn on the front of the body. These things are effective when you are facing your enemy, not when you are running scared. Stand strong. The battle we are in is a battle we can win.

But you don’t do it alone. We are moving from *Me* to *We*. This whole description, this whole illustration, is not focused primarily on the individual believer but on the church. All together. Plural. This is such an important shift in mindset, I can’t emphasize it enough. Don’t attempt to run out on the battlefield alone! We, all together, we as a church take up the belt of truth and the breastplate of righteousness. We, the church, have ready gospel boots on and carry a shield of faith. It may be your buddy’s shield that defends you! We have the helmet of salvation on and we wield the sword of the Spirit. It’s the *church* that does these things, together, in community as the body of Christ. Do you feel the difference? The church is the focus. We are so stuck in the consumer mindset, “It’s all about me.” Don’t come to church as a consumer any longer. You’re not in the stands; you are a player on the field. The church is not put in the service of the individual (although the individual will be well-served to join the church); the individual is put in the service of the church and its mission! Ask not what First Pres can do for you.... And by the way, the *church* is put in service of *Christ* its head for *His mission*. As is said,

“God doesn’t have a mission for the church; God has a church for the mission.”

Finally, it all hinges on prayer: “And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the Lord’s people. Pray also for me, that whenever I speak, words may be given me so that I will fearlessly make known the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in chains. Pray that I may declare it fearlessly, as I should” (Ephesians 6:18-20). The battle we are in will rise or fall on prayer. So, what are you praying for? A large study was conducted of dying churches some years ago and one key difference between a church that died and a church that carried on was what they were praying for. Some churches prayed to defend the building, keep the lights on. Others prayed to be a light for their city, to reach their city with the light of Christ. What are you praying for? Pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. Pray for the Lord’s people. Are you praying for your church? “Pray also for me,” Paul said, “that whenever I speak, words may be given me so that I will fearlessly make known the mystery of the gospel.” Then he repeats it, “that I may declare it fearlessly.” That’s a little vulnerability from the preacher there. It’s a fearful thing to speak of Jesus, to share the light and life of Christ in a hostile world, to proclaim the way of Christ over the way of Cain. Do you pray for your pastor? For all your pastors, teachers, youth leaders? The battle we are in is a battle we can win. It rises and falls on prayer.

I’m asking, no, I’m begging you to pray for the effective gospel ministry of First Pres. It’s our birthday this week! At 146 we are looking pretty good, but let me share my heart with you a little in one area. Worship numbers are flat. We have fewer bodies in church this summer than we did last summer. Bottom line. There’s plenty of room in here. If you experience something worth experiencing when you are here, you need to share that with someone. We come and drink deep, satisfying draughts of the love and grace of God together while nearby we have neighbors and friends and relatives who have not tasted a drop of God’s grace. Are you praying for your church to be an effective gospel ministry? For the preaching and the preachers to have God’s anointing? When I arrived here, I had a picture of the church that kept coming back to me—we were like the Giving Tree. Remember Shel Silverstien’s, *The Giving Tree*? Here, take our apples. Here, take our leaves. Take our branches, take our wood, until it was getting down to the stump. We had better pray for new growth. Please pray. Pray for the effectiveness of this church for the Lord’s continuing mission in this city.

Next week is the big fall kickoff. Everything starts. Over

the last year, we have hired a Pastor of Family Ministries, Tom Pipkin. We have added Heather Houston for Middle School ministry and Nathan Richards for High School, Bethany Hanson and Candice Ware have stepped in to lead Children's Ministry. Pray that we are more effective than ever at reaching our students and children for Christ. Vacation Bible School has tripled in two years—it needs to triple again. This summer we added Andy Morrison to our staff in partnership with Young Life College Ministry to reach our college students. Pray that we have a more effective college ministry than we have ever had. Just last week we hired Floyd Sebald to lead us in establishing the First Pres Fellows program. One year from now we will begin welcoming a dozen interns right out of college each year. We are soon changing our brand; our logo and messaging is all shifting to let Colorado Springs know that God is doing something new here. Our communications team and administrative staff are working their fingers to the bone. Pray that our city and world will know that the gospel we proclaim is good news for them! Chris Cullins and Jim DeJarnette are faithfully producing the most inspiring worship experiences you could imagine with growing teams of gifted, creative music staff like Scott Barbier, Rod Gorby and Brandin Stroy. Pray that our time in worship is the most powerful spiritual experience of the week! Katie Fowler moved this year into her new role as Pastor of Discipleship and has led the way in a momentous expansion and development of Life Groups launching next week. Pray for little First Pres pockets of healthy devotion to Jesus in every neighborhood in this city.

We are too often trying to win spiritual battles in earthly ways when we should be winning earthly battles in spiritual ways. The battle will be won or lost in prayer. But the battle we are in is a battle we can win. Why? Because the battle belongs to the Lord, and He has already secured the victory. Jesus didn't take the sword and spill blood to build His city. Jesus allowed the sins of all the world to be placed on Him, once and for all, and shed His own blood. And when He rose again from the dead on Easter morning, the victory was secured. Sin and death no longer have any claim. The flaming arrows of the deceiver cannot penetrate your heart. You are safe and secure and claimed by the blood of Jesus Christ. Nothing can defeat Him; He has already overcome death itself and there is no other force to prevail against Him. That's it. It's over. The war is already won, but we live toward that victory in daily struggle, in daily battles against lies and deceit. Take up the battle. The battle we are in is a battle we can win in Christ, because the victory belongs to the Lord.

STUDY GUIDE

FROM ME TO WE • EPHESIANS 6:10-6:24

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

Read the passage for the week: Ephesians 6:10-6:24. 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 be strong in the Lord? Who do you know models that?
- In your own words, what does it mean to be in a spiritual battle?
- Re-Read verses 13-17. What do you notice about the armor of God that we have been given to wear? What stands out to you and seems significant?
- Is there an area of your life that feels like a battle right now? Spend some time talking to the Lord about that area of your life.
- Read Proverbs 21:31. What does it mean that the victory belongs to the Lord?
- As we wrap up our study in the book of Ephesians, what has stood out to you the most? What do you think the Lord has been saying to you?

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

Try a simple practice this week: a prayer walk. Set aside some time to walk and pray through a particular area of town: perhaps your neighborhood or downtown around First Pres.

IN: Connect With the Family of God

Spend some time praying for First Pres. Pray for more and more people to hear and respond to the good news of Jesus. Pray for the flourishing of God's church!