

Turning ME into WE
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GFC – Together Series – 9/8/19

Next week is Back to Church Sunday and we will begin a new sermon series based on the book of Ephesians called Together. Today I want to prepare us for that. So, I'm preaching a sermon entitled Turning ME into WE.

It's important for each of us to understand the loving Father heart of God. Life changes when you understand that God loves you unconditionally! Life changes when you understand that you are saved by grace and there is no condemnation in Christ.

Yes, we need an understanding of love of God and our identity in Christ. But I want to add this: God is all about you – but not JUST you! God is all about other people too!

Satan wants to steal all of this truth from you! He wants to steal your identity by giving you an orphan spirit that keeps you from knowing God as Father. The result of that is a self-centered and independent life where you live for yourself, but without any real identity, purpose or destiny.

That kind of life is way beneath what Jesus died for! 2 Corinthians 5:15 says:

He died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for Him who died for them and was raised again.

Wow! Yes, Jesus died to save you from your sins and give you eternal life. But He also died to change the way you live. He wants you to turn Me into We so you don't just live for yourself!

There are other people who do find their identity as a son or daughter of the Father, but they think they're an only child! Everything is about them. They don't initiate relationships with other people. They make church all about themselves and their needs. They don't give anything, but they expect everyone to give to them. They expect others to pray for them, but they don't pray for others. They expect the worship leaders to sing only the songs they like. They put no thought into the needs of other people. They want to do what pleases themselves without thinking of others. But this is not what Jesus died for!

The result of everyone living for themselves is an epidemic of loneliness! Some of you today are feeling alone today. Please realize that relationships are God's antidote for aloneness. Psalm 68:6 says: *God places lonely people in families.* And the church is the family of God!

So – press through your fear and reach out to others in the family! Get involved in the men’s or women’s ministries. Or get involved serving in a ministry. Some people try that and still don’t make relationships. Why? Because they make it all about themselves rather than others.

They sit there waiting for someone else to approach them and the ones they are waiting on are sitting waiting on someone to approach them. So – if everyone is waiting on everyone else – no one will ever initiate relationship and we will never turn ME into WE.

The path to spiritual maturity goes from orphanhood to child of the Father to mature sonship that is a vital part of God’s family. That family is the church.

I know it’s popular these days to put the church down. Many people think that they don’t need church. But they just don’t know what they’re missing.

Now – I’m not talking about just attending church.
 I’m talking about becoming part of a family of believers who live life together.
 Who laugh together and cry together.
 Who pray for each other when we have needs.
 Who encourage each other when we are discouraged.
 Who lift each other up when we are down.
 Who give to each other when there is financial crisis.
 Who share each other’s deepest secrets and pain and hopes and dreams.
 We all belong in a place like that. And that place is the church!

I’m not saying you belong in a building. The church is much more than a building. In fact, the building is not the church – it is the place the church meets!

Technically, Church is not a place you go to. Church is a family you belong to. There’s a big difference. The Christian life is not just a matter of believing. It is matter of belonging, and you and I must choose to belong. If you’re looking for a place to belong, that place is the family of God. Ephesians 3:14-15 says:

For this reason I kneel before the Father, from whom His whole family in heaven and on earth derives its name.

First and foremost, the church is a family. We are not perfect because we are people and there are no perfect people - but we do our best to build relationships with each other. We are a family, so we help each other in times of need. Galatians 6:10 says:

Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers.

The church is not perfect, but we do our best to meet people’s needs.

The church is God's family and I want us to gain an understanding of how much we need each other. Yes... our main need is God, but God designed us to need each other! Romans 12:5 says:

Since we are all one body in Christ, we belong to each other and each of us needs all the others.

It is impossible to fulfill the purposes of God for our lives alone. You can't do it by yourself. It's impossible. God wired all of us in such a way that we can only fulfill His purposes for our lives in relationship with each other. We need each other. And you cannot be everything God wants you to be on your own. You were created for community – the family of God. WE is better than ME!

I believe that the more you grow – the more you'll know that you need others and others need you. I remember when our youngest grandson was about a year old. He thought the entire universe revolved around him. When he came to the church during the week – he thought he ran the whole church. In his mind – all of us existed to do his will and meet his needs. And if we didn't – he'll pitch a fit about it! That's ok – he's a baby. He's immature. But as he grows up – part of maturing is coming to the understanding that it's not all about him – it's also about God and other people.

I know many adults who go through life with the same immature belief and behavior that a baby has. They believe everything is about them and for them and if you don't believe it – just watch how they act if their needs aren't met! They will cry, whine, pout, make messes, and throw temper tantrums when they don't get their own way.

They leave marriages, jobs and churches if their needs aren't met. But don't you expect them to give or do anything for anyone else. They really believe it is all about them! Why is that? Because the essence of sin is selfishness and independence. Isaiah 53:6 says:

We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; and the Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all.

This passage defines the essence of sin: going our own way rather than God's way. Now we Americans love our independence. Our nation was founded on the Declaration of Independence. And so we say things like "I got to be me." "I did it my way." "I don't need anybody else."

We've been taught that happiness is the result of independence. We believe if I'm financially independent, if I'm relationally independent, if I am independent in every way, then I will be the happiest. And yet, we have never had more unhappy people! In fact, the suicide rate is sky-rocketing. Why? Because independence not the answer.

The truth is, happiness does not come from being independent and isolated. And happiness does not come from the other extreme: being dependent or co-dependent. Happiness comes from interdependence, from community.

From the very beginning of time, it's been God's plan for us to be in relationship to each other. When God made Adam and he put him in the Garden of Eden, it was a perfect environment. And yet, He looked down and said in Genesis 2:18: *It is not good for man to be alone.*

It is not good for man to be what? "Be alone." God does not want anybody to be alone. So, He created two institutions: Family and the church. Marriage is till death do us part, but the family of God goes on forever.

The church is the community of faith, the family of God. The church is the "body of Christ." 1 Corinthians 12:27 says:

All of you together are the one body of Christ, and each one of you is a separate and necessary part of it.

You see, I'm not the body of Christ. You're not the body of Christ. But together, we are the body of Christ. Because of that we cannot fulfill God's purposes for our lives alone. We need each other! 1 Corinthians 12:18-21 says:

God has arranged the parts in the body, every one of them, just as he wanted them to be. If they were all one part, where would the body be? As it is, there are many parts, but one body. The eye cannot say to the hand, "I don't need you!" And the head cannot say to the feet, "I don't need you!"

We are the body of Christ. We belong together and we need each other. All the others. We can't pick and choose which parts of the body of Christ we need. We all need everyone else. We can't say, "I don't need people with certain gifts or people with certain personalities or people of certain colors." God created us to need each other. That means each of us has deficiencies that causes us to need others. You cannot go through life saying, "I don't need anyone else." There are some things in life you'll never be able to do without other people in your life. That means we're better together than we are alone. That's why we must turn ME into WE!

God says serving together is better than serving alone. When God wants to do something big, it takes more than one person. You know that's true. You always get more done by working with other people.

I have a brother in law who built his house all by himself. It took three years. Have you ever seen the movie *Witness* where the Amish build a barn? The whole community turns out, they work together, everybody does their part and they get it done in one day. If the farmer had tried to build it himself, it would have been impossible.

Yet many of us try to do everything in life alone. But God never intended for you to walk through life alone. Never. He wants you to have people around you who lift you up to higher levels of achievement. When you turn ME into WE – you will accomplish more! I want you to see a truth from 1 Chronicles 15:3-4:

David gathered all Israel together at Jerusalem, to bring up the ark of the Lord to its place, which he had prepared for it. Then David assembled the children of Aaron and the Levites...

We see here that David gathered the people and then assembled them into teams of leaders, priests, worshippers and doorkeepers. We sometimes see gathering and assembling as the same thing. But there are some differences. A gathering is a crowd - a meeting of individuals. Assembling is when they each get connected, build relationships, find their place of ministry and begin to function together. Hebrews 10:25 tells us to:

Do not forsake the assembling of ourselves together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encourage one another, especially now that the day of His return is drawing near.

Assembling does mean to keep meeting together. Obviously – attending church is something the Bible commands us not to give up. But assembling is more than just meeting.

It's like the difference between an auto parts store and an automobile assembly plant. You can go to an auto parts store and find all the parts of a car. All the parts are gathered there.

Carburetor – really carburates

Muffler – really muffles

Catalytic converter – convert some catalyctcs

But parts do nothing on the shelf. They might look good, but they don't work until they are assembled, put together.

We have a GM assembly plant near us and they have all the parts to an automobile. But those parts are not just sitting on shelves! They are being assembled together to make a working drivable vehicle.

A church is not a parts warehouse. This is not just a place where all the parts just gather to say hi. This is not a place where we just show up to show off and look good. The church is an assembly plant where different parts are being fitly joined together into a working unit.

Christians accomplish nothing if all they do is attend church. We must move beyond just going to church and start being the church. We must move beyond looking good on the shelf and get into working order. That means we must get connected to others. We must also find our place of ministry and start doing ministry together.

Not being connected with the body of Christ limits what the church can accomplish because individuals cannot accomplish what the whole can accomplish. Ephesians 4:16 says:

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.

How many parts must do their share for the church to grow? Each part! What's your part? And are you doing it?

Let me ask you this: what would the church be like if everyone was like you? If everyone attended like you – built relationships like you – gave like you – served like you – witnessed like you – worshipped like you?

You can worship alone – and you should - but when you worship with other believers, Jesus said Matthew 18:20:

For where two or three are gathered together in My name, I am there in the midst of them.

There's a realm of God's presence we don't get into on our own! E is better than ME!

You can do warfare alone – and you should - but there is greater power when we war together. Leviticus 26:8 says:

Five of you will chase a hundred, and a hundred of you will chase ten thousand, and your enemies will fall by the sword before you.

We have greater victories when we fight together. WE is better than ME!

You can pray alone – and you should - but there is power in the prayer of agreement. Jesus said in Matthew 18:19:

If two of you on earth agree about anything you ask for, it will be done for you by My Father in heaven.

There are some things we only receive when we pray together. WE is better than ME!

There is power in turning ME into WE. Turning ME into WE multiplies our impact. Turning ME into WE gives bigger and better results.

One snowflake is nothing, but if a bunch of snowflakes stick together, they can stop traffic. One wave is no big deal, but if you combine a bunch of little waves, they become a powerful tsunami. One raindrop is no big deal, but God combined a bunch of raindrops and flooded the whole earth.

There is power when we turn ME into WE. I encourage you to get connected. Start making some friends, but start with Jesus.

Your most important connection is your connection with God. If you are not connected to Him through faith in Jesus Christ – nothing else in life works right. In John 15:5, Jesus said:

I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing.

Apart from Christ – life doesn't work like it's supposed to work. The vine shares its life with the branches. Our role is to stay connected to Jesus and His life will flow in us and through us.

The branch must be connected to have life in it. A severed branch will look like it has life for a while, but it doesn't! When I trim trees in my yard, for the first few days, those branches I had cut off looked no different from the branches still connected to the tree. But after a few days, those disconnected branches slowly began to wilt and dry and turn brown and brittle.

It's the same way if we are disconnected from God. We may look okay and be okay for a while, but ultimately it is dangerous and deadly to be disconnected from the life of God.

So – are you connected to God through His Son, Jesus Christ? Friends come and go in our lives.

But Jesus is not a fair-weather friend; He's an all-weather friend!
He will never leave you nor forsake you!

You may think you have some close friends, but Jesus is a friend who sticks closer than a brother.

You may have some friends in high places, but Jesus is the friend in the highest place!

You may think you have some lifelong friends; but Jesus is a friend for eternity!
You may think you have some friends who are faithful, but Jesus is faithful even when we are faithless.

He will always be there for you! He will never let you down!

In fact, He will encourage you when you're down!

He will lift you up when you fall! He will comfort you when you're hurting!

Have you accepted Him as your Lord and Savior? I encourage you to do so today!

When you repent of your sin and place your faith in Jesus – you are born again.

That's means you have a brand-new life in Christ.

It also means you become a part of the family of God.

I encourage you to turn ME into WE today!