

ME TO WE

INTRODUCTION

How many have a fence somewhere in your yard? Have you ever considered the pros and cons of fences? They help keep things in, but they also keep things out. They don't let strangers wander into your yard, but they don't let friends wander there either. With a privacy fence, people can't see into your yard, but you can't see out. Fences can be beautiful, but they require a lot of maintenance.

The last SoulShift, from Me to We, deals with the problem of fences. It speaks to the way God helps rid us of our pride, fear, and preoccupation with ourselves.

Our society tends to gravitate toward the Me side of the continuum, and our culture encourages this. Even the church is on board, speaking of our "personal relationship" with Jesus Christ, our "closet of prayer," and our worship that is full of our favorite kinds of music. Even in church, we have drunk deeply from the wells of narcissism.

TEXTUAL WORK: A PATTERN OF FENCES

Over the past nine weeks, we have been following the disciples as they walked along the way with Jesus. There is a pattern that has surfaced in most of their conversations. Even after Jesus taught them about suffering and dying for others, they were stuck on themselves and oblivious to each other. They kept thinking that their own private encounter with Jesus was what this new religion was all about while Jesus was trying to do something with all of them together. They kept thinking Me, and he kept thinking We.

As before, they followed Jesus for two years and still hadn't shifted in this important way. Let's look at a few incidents:

- Mark 9:33–34. While Jesus described his own sacrifice and death for the world, the disciples began to argue among themselves as to which of them was the greatest (see Luke 9:46). They compared themselves and wanted to know who had the best story, highest degree, most impressive achievement, sharpest mind, best personality, and most spirituality. Somehow they judged their own spirituality apart from the others. As we will see in a moment, Jesus had a different mind. *Note: You may use common examples of how you have seen a competitive spirit among some Christians today.*
- Mark 9:38. After the last argument, the disciples boldly reported to Jesus that they “saw a man driving out demons in your name and [they] told him to stop, because he was not one of [them].” Call this the sectarian spirit. It surfaced again when the disciples tried to keep the children away. The sectarian spirit labels people as worthy or unworthy and treats them accordingly. It places itself at the front door of the kingdom and decides who is serious, ready, or genuine enough to enter. The sectarian spirit cannot rejoice or explain when people outside one’s own circle are blessed. Here again, the disciples put up a fence between themselves and those who were not one of them. *Note: You may use more examples of how you have seen this sectarian spirit among Christians today.*
- Mark 10:35–37. A little further “along the way,” two disciples came to Jesus and asked for a special privilege: “‘Let one of us sit at your right and the other at your left in glory.’ . . . When the ten heard about this, they became indignant with James and John” (vv. 37, 41). Call this an overzealous spirit. It wants to distinguish itself from the others. It is attracted to status or position and is

hierarchical. It can only lead down, never up. It cannot appreciate one's equal, but only one's subordinate. It has a hard time sharing the spotlight.

Throughout the Gospels, we have seen the disciples' tendency for this. Even today, we may follow Jesus for years yet still be far too interested in ourselves and put our own agenda ahead of the community's. We can be fiercely loyal to Jesus without being loyal to each other.

IMPLICATIONS: WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BELONG?

Many churches today are only gatherings of people who love Jesus more than they love each other. Some even consider this a virtue or badge of their loyalty to God, even though Jesus said something exactly opposite (see John 15:12, 17; 1 John 4:7–8). They attend a church as long as it's growing and interesting, but as soon as things change, they take their love of Jesus to another church because the last one wasn't spiritual enough.

But if we really are a body, then maybe we are each only as spiritual as the climate of the whole church. Maybe we can't be holy by ourselves any more than we could be a one-man Trinity, not because God won't let us but because it's simply a contradiction in terms. If being holy is being like Jesus and Jesus is part of a triune community, then maybe we are only as holy as our community.

APPLICATION: MOVE FROM ME TO WE

When we move from Me to We, we soften our borders. We open up to people who are not like us. So when someone complains that they don't like the community because "they're just so different from me," that is the point.

Do you want to begin the shift from Me to We? Then take the following steps:

- Get involved in a small group.
- Take a membership class and join your local church.

- Loan your things to others in your community. Let them have or use your best ideas.
- Begin to pray that God will send people who are not like you to your church, and encourage them to join it. Train them to become leaders.
- Attend and support a worship service that uses a different style of music.
- Practice submitting to the authority in your church.

When we move from Me to We, we see people of every race, class, and strata in our community coming together to serve Jesus Christ in every level of his body. We see a church on the front end of the reconciliation between classes and ethnicities. We see the church as a house of prayer for all nations. We see people giving honor to members that lack it.

CONCLUSION

Toward the end of World War II, a group of American soldiers carried the body of their fallen comrade to a nearby cemetery for burial. They were greeted by a priest who informed them that they could not bury their friend in the cemetery because it was a Catholic cemetery and their friend was not Catholic. Disappointed, the soldiers carried their friend's body to a place just outside the cemetery fence, hoping to place him as close as possible to the sacred ground. There they dug a small grave and buried him after a humble ceremony. The following day, when the soldiers returned to pay their final respects, they were confused when they could not find the grave. After some searching, they called for the priest again and asked what had happened to their friend's grave. He said, "The first half of the night, I spent sorry for what I told you, and the second half I spent moving the fence."

Will you move the fences in your life? Will you help us move the fences of our church? When we move from Me to We, we partner with people we have never met and include people

who are not like us so that we can become what we have not been and do what we have never done. *Note: You may call the leaders of the church onto the platform to pray over the congregation.*