



Welcome back to our winter preaching series – **THIS IS US!** We are taking a serious look at what it means for us to embrace and become **THE BELOVED COMMUNITY** that **Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.** spoke of, and what Jesus and the Bible refers to as the Kingdom of God. Today, I want to reflect scripturally with you on **the power of WE, not ME!** We might call this **The Power of Plural living – aka – TOGETHERNESS!**



<https://www.songfacts.com/facts/three-dog-night/one>

Back in **1968**, when I was **six years old**, I remember us kids getting a **Three Dog Night album** with **their hit song, "ONE"** sometimes better known for its first line, **"ONE IS THE LONELIEST NUMBER THAT YOU'LL EVER DO."** That was back in the days of vinyl records, right alongside the marvelous high-tech invention of 8-track tapes. The song was actually a reference to the groups' name (Three Dog Night). The name was a reference to the historical practice of human's having a dog sleep with them when

nights were cold. So, if it was a "THREE-DOG-NIGHT," you knew it had to be down in single digits or below. The inference is simple. If you are trying to sleep on a **THREE-DOG-NIGHT**, and you only have **ONE DOG**, then **ONE** will indeed, be *a very lonely and cold number for you*. Remember what Solomon mused over in his personal reflections Journal called, Ecclesiastes:

Two are *better than one*, because they have a good return for their labor...but how can one keep warm alone?...A cord of three strands is not quickly broken"
Ecclesiastes 4:9, 11b, 12b NIV

Life is full of lessons that remind us that **ONE** really is the loneliest number that we will ever do. In fact, *the Bible discourages solitary, isolated, live-on-my-own lifestyles*. We were formed for family and made for community. The Body of Christ is a Holy Spirit infused and gifted family, called to live as **THE BELOVED COMMUNITY**, mutually interdependent upon one another and serving each other as an expression of agape love (unmeted, unmeasured, unconditional). **This is LIFE IN THE PLURAL.**

I am suggesting to us today that **navigating our way into and through the "Beloved Community" life means standing strong---TOGETHER!** As it turns out, various forms of suffering/troubles/hardships can actually force a unifying merger of hearts, minds, and hands when otherwise we likely would have remained separate. **Cultivating ONENESS** and living with a **collective HOPE** firmly **anchored in Jesus Christ**, will never disappoint us. This is **the power of WE, of LIFE IN THE PLURAL** that Paul speaks of to the Romans.

Read Romans 5:1-5 NIV (Life in the Plural)

5 Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, *we* have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, 2 through whom *we* have gained access by faith into this grace in which *we* now stand. And *we* boast in the hope of the glory of

God. 3 Not only so, but **we** also glory in **our** sufferings, because **we** know that suffering produces perseverance; 4 perseverance, character; and character, hope. 5 And hope does not put **us** to shame, because God's love has been poured out into **our** hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to **us**.

Some may think that highlighting the plural pronouns in Paul's letter is merely a linguistic gimmick the author didn't actually intend. It is not my contention to say there is no recognition in the Bible of individual beliefs, behaviors, or actions because that is equally true. It is absolutely my assertion to you today that our story as Christ followers is tied up in each other's story. We are not isolated spiritual islands.

**"The eye cannot say to the hand,
'I don't need you!'"**

1 Corinthians 12:21a NIV

In fact, our togetherness is paramount to our unity and maturity, otherwise we will be stuck and stagnant in faith. This is what Paul shares with the Ephesians about the nature of the family being created by the Spirit we call, **THE CHURCH!**

"Make *every effort* to keep the *unity* of the Spirit through the bond of peace... But to each one of us *grace [gifts]* has been given as Christ apportioned it... to *equip* his people for works of service... until we all reach *unity* in the faith and...become *mature*..."

Ephesians 4:3, 7, 12a, 13

I hope you heard in the Romans text today the divine supply chain which initiates and effects this new life of the Beloved community, the body of Christ, the kingdom of God. The section begins with the word, **"THEREFORE,"** and whenever that happens, ***everything after it is predicated on everything that was spoken before.*** So here's what was just spoken: ***Romans Chapter 4: Abraham didn't make the grade so God made it for him.*** He was made right with God by God's grace through Jesus, not through his own works and righteousness. His story is our story – the human story. **The WE in chapter five is the rest of the world!** Here's what Jesus does for us via mutuality and partnership:

WE: The Power of Plural!

Justified	Made right with God
Peace	Made complete/sound/well
Access	Admission through Jesus
Stand (live)	Do life through grace [gifts]
Boast	Bold resolve & confidence in the hope God provides
Glory	Bold resolve & confidence through hard trials
Know (believe)	Trials lead to triumph

Now look at that big picture for just a moment. The collective realization is that God provides all the necessary ingredients for this new collective experience. God establishes the restored relationship; He draws us into a completing story and empowers us to both receive and give His peace as tangible expressions of a better life, grounded in a greater hope, and triumphant over all life's challenges and obstacles that would seek us to stop, stall, and stagnate in discipleship.

But God moves His people on to victory and breakthrough. He asks us to use His victory in Jesus to make our lives victorious and then to use our freedom to go and release others into this amazing story of new life in Christ. Can you say today with certainty that this too is your story? Blessed to be a blessing? Saved to serve? Set apart to secure a new start for others?



WE ARE 

<http://weare1movement.com/about>

I want to introduce you to B. Haley (Brian). He's the Founder and President of the "We Are One" Movement. Long before that, Haley grew up on the mean inner city streets of St. Louis, MO, where he became a wanna-be drug dealer. For many years, he walked down destructive paths filled with violence in an 'every man for himself' environment. He was well on his way to becoming another disappointing inner-city social statistic. But then He met God, his life was changed.

He **moved to Nashville**, was raised up and **platformed by Toby Mac**, one of the most renowned Christian bands of all time, and became their **drummer for 17 years**. During that time, **God gave B a vision** that he hasn't been able to shake. A vision for our world to **live united and come together**. To put down the many differences that divide us and pick up the **one thing that unites us—LOVE**. That's when he started speaking at the Toby Mac Concerts and finally retired from the drums so he could found his organization: B says,

WE ARE

"It is a movement with Purpose. It's a lifestyle. To Love, Unite and Build a community of one through our Service to each other. Powered by Love we Expect to make a difference in the world by loving each other through service and being united. We can do more Together than we could ever do alone."
B. Haley

Armed with a blazing passion to make this world a better place through unity, **the We Are 1 Movement was birthed**. Today, he travels and speaks all across America with this important message for Christ followers and is centered on Jesus Christ as the world's bridge-builder and uniter. For the next 47 seconds, lift your eyes to the screens with me and listen in to B. Haley's important appeal.



<http://weare1movement.com/power-of-we>

The work of reconciliation among ALL PEOPLE is a work that was uniquely assigned to the followers of Jesus Christ. It wasn't assigned to governments and policy makers, because **human EMPIRES** focus on pluralistic policy devoid of religious preference or values. **The work of UNITY and MATURITY was given to the CHURCH (THE BELOVED COMMUNITY), the Kingdom of God, the Body of Christ** – to finish what

Jesus began – a revolution in love, acceptance, forgiveness, and healing for the whole world.

In a more rhythmic and rhyming cliché, Dr. Tony Evans gets even a little more pointed than what B. Haley quoted. When he says, "**God will not skip the CHURCH HOUSE in order to fix the WHITE HOUSE!**" From God's perspective, **the most powerful office in the world is not located at 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW, Washington, DC 20500!** That's why Jesus said of all believers, in **John 14:12**, "**They will do even greater things than these.**" The prolific and popular Haitian-born French writer and novelist, Alexandre Dumas, coined this now famous phrase:

**"All for one and one for all, united
we stand divided we fall"**

**Alexandre Dumas, 1844
The Three Musketeers**

This is what B. Haley is devoting his life to now. Unity through Jesus Christ. That is the dream of the Beloved community that Martin Luther lived and died for. It's what Jesus taught, the prophets of old declared, and the original version of paradise that God created, where there was **NO SHAME (Genesis 2:25)**. **This is the same theme and outcome that Paul picks up on in Romans 5:5.**

"Hope does not put us to *shame*"
[disgrace, disappointment, shame, utter frustration]
Romans 5:5a NIV

The million-dollar question for Jesus followers is in what or in whom have we located our HOPE? **Hymn-writer Edward Mote** got that question right: He wrote lyrics to a song for us to remember back in **1834: *My hope is built on nothing less, Than Jesus' blood and righteousness. I dare not trust the sweetest frame, But wholly lean on Jesus' name.***

Our world is facing great divisions today; socially, politically, religiously, racially, ideologically, nationality (nation against nation). It seems there are far more "OTHERS" out there in this big world than there used to be, and so

many seem and feel to be much closer to home. And what we choose to do will determine who we become and where our story travels. We have three choices before us. **FIGHT – FLIGHT – FRIEND!** The first involves demonizing, blaming, accusing, lambasting, and defeating. The second involves denying, distancing, fleeing, insulating, self-preserving, and/or ignoring a great divide. **The third is the most important and most difficult. FRIENDING involves COURAGE and HONESTY. It entails a commitment to CLARITY OF THE CONCERN, COMMITMENT TO THE CAUSE FOR JUSTICE, AND COMPASSION IN LOVE FOR THOSE WHO MAY OPPOSE YOU, DISAGREE WITH YOU, OR HURT YOU.** What path will we be choosing in the future?

Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. reminds us why this latter path is the path of the Kingdom of God, of the Beloved community, the body of Christ and faithful followers of Jesus:

Now there is a final reason I think that Jesus says, 'Love your enemies.'
It is this: that *love has within it a redemptive power.* And there is a power there that eventually transforms individuals.

"Loving Your Enemies" Speech delivered at Dexter Avenue Baptist Church, Montgomery, Alabama, November 17, 1957.

Three Dog Night was right. One really is the loneliest number that you'll ever do. The Bible recommends life in the plural; a woven tapestry of TOGETHERNESS. This is how good triumphs over evil. **JESUS FOLLOWERS --- LET US-----UNITE ON THIS HOLY QUEST!**