



Communal Culture: Eastern vs. Western Thinking

Notes

WE vs. ME	Eastern	Western
Identity	Defined by my community; especially family.	I am my own person. My job is a big part of my identity.
Home/Land	The home is mostly a public space, a small amount is private Ancestral land Much sharing	Prefer privacy No long term ties to home/land Limited sharing
Drives behavior	Honor/shame	Right/wrong
Faith	Public, communal scripture and prayer, discuss and wrestle with scripture together.	Personal -- quiet time reading Bible and praying alone, public worship with a group of individuals.
Authority	Authority structures are in place and obeyed.	There are laws, but I will decide what I will obey, what is right for me.
How to act	Conform	Be yourself
Greatest value	The community -- rooted in family, land, God	The individual -- personal preferences

Singular or plural “you”?

- 1 Corinthians 6:19 -- A (singular) temple made up of (plural) stones. We are not each a temple, but together make up a temple.
- Jeremiah 29:11 -- Context is to Judah before their exile to Babylon. God’s promise is to the nation of Judah, not to individuals -- many of them would die in captivity.

Application

- Aim to read the biblical text through the Eastern perspective.
- Consider the presence of the community in the story, even if it is not mentioned.
- Assume most of the “you’s” are plural as you read, addressing the community, not just you as an individual.

Discussion Questions

- In what aspects do you see yourself having a Western mindset? Do you lean toward an Eastern perspective in some areas?
- When you are worshipping, is your main thought about “me and God, my time worshipping him” or US and God, OUR time worshipping him? Are the lyrics in the songs you sing more individual (“I” and “me”) or communal (“us” and “we”) and how does that affect worship?
- We pray for forgiveness individually. Should we be praying repentantly for the sins of our community/nation even if we are innocent of these? Skim Daniel 9, focusing on verses 4 and 5.

Read the following through Western and then through Eastern eyes. How does that differ?

- Luke 12:16-21 (Man who wanted to build bigger barns)
 - What did he do wrong?
- Genesis 4:13-14 (Cain’s punishment)
 - Why was this punishment so bad?
- Matthew 6:9-13 (The Lord’s Prayer)
 - When you pray this, do you mentally substitute “our/us/we” with “my/me/I”?
- New Testament passages with “you” (these are plural in Greek; we often read as singular)
 - James 4:8
 - Romans 8:9
 - Ephesians 4:29-32

Recommended Resource

[*Reading the Bible with Rabbi Jesus by Lois Tverberg*](#)

(Great book overall; the chapters that link with today’s lesson include “Reading the Bible as a ‘We’” and “Greek Brain, Hebrew Brain.”)

