
VISION FORWARD

The Bread of Life



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This picture is from Berlin, Germany during the First World War. We see those who are waiting for bread and other essential supplies that were scarce. Many waited hours in line but only to be disappointed—to be told there was no more of what they had been hoping for. Imagine the disappointment, the discouragement, and the hopelessness you would feel. Imagine the walk home and entering to tell your wife and your children that there was no more bread. That there was no more anything. “But you were gone for hours!”

All around us are lines of broken, hungry, thirsty souls, driven by emptiness in pursuit of a bread that, at worst, perishes and doesn't nourish and, at best, nourishes and yet perishes. They each are waiting in line for what they

“The church is the only organization that does not exist for itself, but for those who live outside of it.”

WILLIAM TEMPLE

believe will give them eternal life, fullness of life. But they are only disappointed time and time again. The emptiness and hopelessness mounts, and yet continues to drive them as long as they think they have a shot in the next line.

“And such were some of you.” You were waiting in line, hungry and thirsty, pursuing something you believed was essential to your happiness, something in which you believed you would find eternal fullness of life. And at the end, in the end, you were disappointed and your emptiness came roaring back. So you found another line. But then Jesus came and by his grace he chose you, he called you, he pulled you out of the line and said, “Follow me. Come home. I’ve prepared a feast for you.” He saved you and filled your heart eternally. You have received abundant life in Christ. In him you now taste and know eternal nourishment, refreshment, and enjoyment of heart. You may go on to succeed in this life, but your deepest satisfaction is Christ. You may go on to fail in this life, but your highest satisfaction is still found in Christ.



And yet Jesus didn’t save us from scarcity to give us a feast that we would enjoy and keep all to ourselves. Part of enjoying the abundant life found in Christ is sharing it with others. In fact, it’s the best part! True having is giving.

The only way for God to give us, and for us to receive, eternal life was for the Bread of Life to be broken apart.

We have and we know the Bread of Life. Freely we have received, freely we must give. We must now offer it, carry it, share it with our lives, even allowing God to break us open like the Bread of Life was for us.

Think of all the things that must be broken for us to receive nourishment: the seed, the soil, the sky, the wheat, the bread.

Eternal life can only come from the broken body of Christ and can only get into the broken hearts of sinners. We are “the fellowship of the broken”.

So what can we do? If we ourselves are broken within, we must come to

We shouldn’t use the city to build great churches, but use the resources of the church to seek a great, flourishing city.

TIM KELLER

Christ, and in him our soul, our self, will find true life. If we have been made whole in Christ, we must be listening and watching and feeling our way through our homes and streets and neighborhoods and city for the broken whose brokenness is being uncovered. This exposed brokenness may look like the poor and the homeless. It may look like the addict who is hopeless. It may look like the foster child or their parents who have lost them to foster care. It may look like those who have everything and are comfortable in life, but feel empty and sad inside. It may look like a spouse torn apart by unfaithfulness. It may look like a student discouraged by their grades. It may look like those tragically caught in the consequences of their sin and dying to get out and live again. It may look like a new friend reaching out to talk.

There is no end to the ways in which man's eternal need for Christ is expressed, is exposed. But there's no end to the ways in which the Broken Bread of Life can meet and fill and satisfy every gaping hole in the human heart. We must proclaim him with both our words and deeds.

There is for us a price and a cost for meeting people's needs—physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual. But the greatest price and cost was the blood of Christ himself. And it has already been paid. Let us go, then, and call out, "Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread, and your labor for that which does not satisfy? Come, everyone who thirsts, come to the waters; and he who has no money, come, buy and eat. Come, buy wine and milk without money and without price. Incline your ear, and come to me; hear, that your soul may live." (Isaiah 55:1-3)

If God were to send us 500 souls today,...

A few months ago, during one of Pastor Bill's sermons, the following question entered and began to stir my heart: *If God sent us 500 souls today, what would we keep doing, stop doing, start doing?* Without delay two things became clear to me.

- (1) SMALL GROUPS — We would need to continue **small groups**. But we wouldn't be able to keep doing them the same way we have. For one, we wouldn't all fit in the sanctuary! We would need to send out and gather in our homes. And so in 2018 we will be reorganizing our small groups to be held in our homes.

Discipleship is essential to our spiritual growth and maturity in Christ. Discipleship is not only an individual pursuit but also a communal pursuit. I would go so far as to say it is only fully accomplished in community. We have guests every single week at Elim Grace, but some of them fall through the cracks. Some of those who do stick around, don't after their 6th or 7th visit. We need to connect new people and new Christians to one another, and the best way to do this is in a smaller group of people. But not only new people and new Christians. If Jesus is right, the world will know that we are his disciples by our love for one another. Surely for the world to see and know his love, it must be **public** in some way. Our **relationships** with one another, not just us as **individuals**, are that public witness to the world around us.

We don't want to be a church **with** small groups. We want to be a church **of** small groups. To help us reach this goal I have asked Malcolm and Heather Huggins to partner with me and help us take this next step. Please pray for them, and for us, as we take steps towards not simply improving small groups as something **optional** but changing our church culture to valuing small groups as something **essential**. I will say more about this in December's Vision Forward.

- (2) LEADERSHIP — We would need to **expand our leadership**. We wouldn't have enough leaders to serve and care for all the people. And so to that end I will be running a year-long leadership course in 2018.

My hope and goal is that (A) out of that selected group of individuals we will identify new deacons and new elders for 2019 and (B) we will begin to enlarge our leadership capacity in the church for our community. I believe we can and should be consistently developing excellent, godly leaders for every area of our life and society, whether churches, businesses, education, government, social services, families, etc..

In both small groups and leadership expansion my sense is that we are strengthening and broadening our foundation for future growth—growth that God is already giving. We must be ready in and out of season for whatever God does. But always to the best of our ability we must be **ready**.

Fall Fest report

Nearly 700 people walked through our doors for Fall Fest 2017 and experienced light, love, joy, and hope! It is always **more** than an event. It is a living expression and embodiment of Christ **living** in us.

As exciting is that upwards of 50 volunteers came and served in a multitude of ways! Many were here days before setting up and some days after cleaning up. Fall Fest cannot happen without these individuals.

Those that volunteer during Fall Fest are often heard saying that it is their favorite event of the year. I think this is true because they are experiencing the joy of serving others, of giving themselves for the sake of another. What we receive far exceeds what we give, not in that anyone receives a standing ovation for serving but in that the power of Christ enlarges our heart with His love as we serve all those He sends us to.

Perhaps, for me personally, the most moving part was watching all the different generations in Elim Grace come together. When I see even 5 and 6 year old little boys and girls sweeping and picking



up garbage, I realize they “get it,” that though they maybe can’t explain it, they “know” they are part of a purpose bigger than themselves and they **want** to be a part of it.