
VISION FORWARD



Small Groups 2018

We've been doing small groups consistently now for 3-4 years, maybe longer. People have come to expect them and a core have come to participate in them. Roughly 22-25% of our partners/attendees are in a small group. If our goal is to be a church with small groups, in addition to other things we offer, then that would be acceptable. But I'm of the conviction that we can't be a church **with** small groups, but must be a church **of** small groups.

Right now **small groups** are something we schedule around our personal calendars. I'm hoping and praying for the day we schedule our **personal calendars** around our small groups. Why? Because I believe small groups are core and vital to our present and future growth as Elim Grace, and to the sustaining and thriving of that growth.

An indicator of our spiritual growth and health—individually and corporately—is the fellowship we routinely cultivate with others.

We have guests every single Sunday, 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.

Jesus said 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 ourselves as **individuals**, are that public witness to the world around us.



As we meet with one another we take care of and serve one another, we exhort and keep one another accountable, we learn from and are formed by one another. In fact, I would argue that the path to becoming a growing and healthy disciple runs straight through community. It is in and through community that fruit is produced in our individual lives, which then becomes something **we** want to share and talk about with others. But this fruit also becomes something **others** notice and want to talk to us about.

Many have already discovered this fulness and fruitfulness, and are rooted in Elim Grace, because of the relationships they have established through a small group. This is something that is available to everyone! But for everyone to experience it, a shift of mindset, a change of culture, needs to occur:

We want to be a church of small groups, not a church with small groups.

We must come to see and believe in the value of a small group as something not optional, but **essential to everyone** in Elim Grace.

A big step towards changing the culture and accomplishing this will be moving our small groups into our homes.

To help us I have asked Malcolm and Heather Huggins to partner and help me in this next step. And they have exceeded my expectations!

Malcolm has reached out to everyone from his home church and his friends' churches to Tim Keller's church and Hillsong. He has read and researched diligently. Here's an undeniable truth: While small groups don't **guarantee** healthy growth in a church, wherever a church is growing and

healthy you **will** find small groups and a large percentage of the church body involved and invested in them.

One of the things Malcolm has developed is a small groups calendar. We would like to move away from our traditional 3 Seasons of small groups (each 6 weeks long for a total of 18) to 4 seasons (season 1 is 6 weeks; season 2 is 7 weeks; season 3 is 7 weeks; season 4 is 10 weeks for a total of 30 weeks). Our **big breaks** will be over the summer and from mid-November through December. We will also have **small breaks** of two weeks between each season (these smaller breaks coincide with the school year calendar).

The path to becoming a growing and healthy disciple runs straight through community.

As you can see, the commitment is greater, and it will take some time for the culture to change, for people to **see and believe in the value of a small group as something essential**. But all change starts with those few who are willing to take a step, to take the lead. Is that you? Is that your family? I am asking you to consider and pray about committing to a small group in 2018. You will be committing to the growth, health, and fruitfulness of both your life and the lives of others.

Some particulars you may want to know:

1) We are going to move from a video-based approach to a **sermon-based** approach. We will develop a simple template for you and those in your group to use every week. Every group will be discussing the sermon they just heard on Sunday. Hopefully, this will greatly widen and deepen the sermon's impact in our lives.



2) Our goal is 13 groups and a minimum 75% participation ratio. This, of course, assumes we stay at our current size as a church. I believe, though, that once we establish small groups and anchor them in the culture, Elim Grace will begin to grow beyond our current size. But while 13/75% is our goal, we won't reach that right out of the gate. So we will establish some short-term wins: we will begin with 6-8 groups and our current 25%. We will aim to get 8-10 groups by Spring or Summer, and then 13 by Winter or early next year. As we reach these goals we will celebrate them together.

3) Once we have our first 6-8 groups we will post the groups (leaders, time, and locations) and ask you to sign-up accordingly. We will start our first season in January, as we normally do.

My prayer is that we begin to see that small groups are not a burden we should carry, but a pathway to enjoying and sharing more of Jesus with others.

Vision Sunday 2018

On Sunday, January 14th, we will be having **Vision Sunday**. I will be preaching a sermon from our 2018 vision verse, Ephesians 2:10.

I hope to share in that sermon some of the “works” we believe God has prepared for us to walk in next year. At the end of the service, there will be a time of prayer when we will consecrate and surrender ourselves as a congregation to God and to his purposes for us.

**“For we are God’s
workmanship,
created in Christ
Jesus for good works,
which God prepared
beforehand, that we
should walk in them.”**

Ephesians 2:10

Offering ourselves up as a “living sacrifice” (Romans 12:1) is not something we do once and for all, but rather **repeatedly**. In the Old Testament, whenever God was leading his people into something new, they would first seek to recommit themselves to God, to renew the covenant. This was not because God would forget them or his covenant, but because they often would.

So we, too, throughout the days and months and years of our lives often forget where we’ve come from, what God has done for us, and what he has called us to. These seasons of renewal and refreshing serve as reminders along the way that we are God’s people and he is our God.

I ask you to mark it on your calendars and invite you to be a part of this moment.

Resurrection Week

Easter Sunday 2018 will mark the beginning of something we’ll call **“Resurrection Week”**. During that week all of us will be encouraged—in the light of the resurrection of Jesus and the new life we have in him—to do something **new**.

Maybe you’ll begin a new hobby and take your first lesson. Maybe you’ll sign-up to take a Foster Training Class. Maybe your small group will find someone’s home and do some repairs on it. Maybe you’ll decide to get baptized. Maybe your family will invite a new family over for dinner. Maybe you’ll write an email you’ve been wanting to for years. Maybe....There are countless possibilities! So start praying, imagining, talking, planning today.

We hope to tell your stories during those weeks and celebrate the God who makes all things new.

