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# VISION FORWARD

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## “REVIVE US AGAIN”

**“Revive us again, oh Lord, that your people may rejoice in you.” (Psalm 85:6)**

The word “revive” means something like “reinvigorate with fresh life”. Though the word “revival” does not appear in the Bible, the idea of it does. Revival is a Biblical idea. “Revival is a season in the life of the church when God causes the normal ministry of the gospel to surge forward with extraordinary spiritual power... Revival is seasonal, not perennial. God causes it; we do not. It is the normal ministry of the gospel, not something eccentric or even different from what the church is always charged to do. What sets revival apart is simply that our usual efforts greatly accelerate in their spiritual blessings...Revival theology is pervasive in the Bible.” (Raymond C. Ortlund)

God is the great Life-giver, reinvigorating his people at different times and in different ways, but always for the same purpose: that Jesus Christ may be glorified and the gospel proclaimed.

As a young teenager I was greatly and permanently marked by a season of revival/reviving in our church.

Growing up in the country of Mexico, pre-internet, news reached us slowly. At some point my dad, who was pastor of a small church in the city of Uruapan, heard about something called “The Toronto Blessing”. A revival, he was told, had broken out. God was visiting his church in a fresh way. But if you’ve been around long enough, then you’ve heard stories and lived to tell the tale of “false” or “empty” revivals and revivalists. A student of the history of revivals, my dad waited, but prayed.

He sought out the opinion of men he trusted, men who had seen and been impacted by past seasons of revival. The verdict was withheld, until a man my father greatly respected, a former teacher and President of Elim Bible Institute, David Edwards, went to see for himself what, if anything, God was in fact doing in Toronto.

David Edwards was reinvigorated with fresh life by God. He encouraged all he knew to “come and see”. Once that report found its way back to us, my dad boarded a plane and traveled to Toronto. The same “reviving” occurred in him, and shortly after his return, began to occur in our church. I remember those days vividly, moments undeniably filled with God’s presence, a strong conviction of sin, a deep abiding sense of joy, passionate praise and worship, periods of weeping and laughing, the lost being saved, the sick being healed, and the demon possessed being set free.

But while those times didn’t last, and that season came to end, it bore fruit that remains to this day. I recognize those days changed me as I came to know and to be known by Jesus in a fresh new way.

I long for those days. Not in a nostalgic way, wishing for the good ol’ days. And not with an ungrateful or critical attitude of where we are today. But in a way that hopes and seeks for God to “revive us again”. I long for it for the sake of my children, for them to experience such a season as I did. I long for it for us, for us to behold more of the glory of Jesus and to be empowered for the work he’s called us to do: connecting people to God, to one another, to the city, and to culture.

Yes, God is moving in our midst! There is growth and there is fruit. But I urge us to be thankful yet expectant of heart. Which disciple following and becoming like Christ would ever say, “I know you as much as I want to and I think I’ve changed enough”; or which local church proclaiming and adoring Christ would ever say, “We’ve reached enough people for you and we’ve done our fair share of good works”. May our prayer and the cry of our heart for ourselves and for our children’s generation be, **“Revive us again, that your people may rejoice in you.”**

## SMALL GROUPS

Why are small groups so important to us? Consider their centrality in the lives of those who responded to this survey:

***I intentionally spend time with other believers in order to help them grow in their faith.***

Attends a Group: 63% Doesn’t Attend a Group: 22%

***I have developed significant relationships with people at my church.***

Attends a Group: 89% Doesn't Attend a Group: 57%

***I am intentionally putting my spiritual gift(s) to use serving God and others.***

Attends a Group: 73% Doesn't Attend a Group: 42%

***Throughout the day I find myself thinking about biblical truths.***

Attends a Group: 74% Doesn't Attend a Group: 45%

While neither I nor Pastor Bill nor any one of our Elders can personally take care of all you, it is our responsibility, our charge, to ensure that you are each cared for. So to that end small groups is our way of ensuring you are each and all cared for.

Consider joining a small group in 2018. Your small group leaders will provide excellent leadership and shepherding for you. Those who attend with you will help shape and grow your faith and character, they will be there to help and serve you, they will be there to encourage and keep you accountable along the way. But, ultimately, as a small group you will not only be *in* community together, you will be *on* mission together as you live out the life and mission of Christ to reach and to serve others.



## MULTIPLYING LEADERS

Our command from Jesus is to make disciples. A sub-section of discipleship is raising up leaders, spiritual leaders, Spirit-formed and Spirit-filled. We are to train, equip, and release these kinds of leaders into all areas of our life together in society, whether in the home, business, government, education, media, etc. But this hinges in large part on us training, equipping, and releasing leaders within Elim Grace. If disciples make disciples, then leaders make leaders.

As we grow and the Lord *adds* to our number (Acts 2:47), we must *multiply* leaders. The increase of people can easily outpace the increase of leaders. This is why I've said in the past that the expansion of our leadership is necessary for the faithful stewardship of the growth God wants to give. While we can't predict that growth, we can be *prepared* for it.

Here's the challenge: to multiply our leaders will naturally involve our young people. If all our elders, deacons, leaders comprise one generation, then what will happen when that generation has served God and fulfilled his purposes for them? There will be no one to lead the next generation. Success is succession and our



generation's faithfulness to God is measured by our faithfulness in serving the next generation (Psalm 145:4).

Now a word that challenges us is the word *different*. If we are to multiply leaders, and some of these new leaders will be young or younger than many of us are, then we should expect that they are going to bring with them different ideas, different gifts, different tools "to the work of ministry" than the ones we have brought. That's good and that's necessary! With each generation come cultural differences rooted in God's eternal

purpose for every generation and culture: to know Jesus and to make him known. God is not a God of one generation, but a God of all generations. And that includes what makes one distinct from another, not better than another.

Remember, each of us have been born and born again for such a time as this, for such a place as this, for such a culture as this. This extends beyond each of *us* to each of *them*—each and every generation.

## RESURRECTION WEEK/SOMETHING SPECIAL

In one month, on Easter Sunday, we will begin something new: "**Resurrection Week**". During that week all of us are 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 try a painting class. 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 there's a family in need and you'll provide dinner for them every night for one week. Maybe you'll finally write that email or send that text. Maybe....There are countless possibilities! So start praying, imagining, talking, planning today.

As Elim Grace we will be doing something new and special that week. On Tuesday night, April 3rd at 7pm, *Mayor Barlow will be our guest* and speak to us on two topics: The fight against drugs and the fight against poverty. Both these topics correspond to our goals and vision as a church, but also to personal goals and vision many of you have shared with me.

I hope we will *all* make every effort to come. If we will fill our sanctuary, imagine the impact that will have on our Mayor. It will *show*, not just say, that we are a group of people who love our city, that we want to partner with him and serve our city by investing the resources God has entrusted to us. Because Oswego doesn't exist to make Elim Grace great. We exist to make it great, to seek its peace and its prosperity today and for the future.