
VISION FORWARD



DO NOT PREVENT THE LITTLE CHILDREN FROM COMING

"Then children were brought to him that he might lay his hands on them and pray. The disciples rebuked the people, but Jesus said, 'Let the little children come to me and do not hinder them, for to such belongs the kingdom of heaven.' And he laid his hands on them and went away." (Matthew 19:13-15)

This past Sunday our youth led us in worship. They rearranged the stage and lights differently than I would have, they chose a song I'm not a fan of, and they dressed in a manner I maybe would have suggested otherwise, if they'd asked me. I knew all these things going into Sunday's services, and while I was getting ready early that morning, the verse above came suddenly to mind and the words, "Do not prevent the children from coming to me" convicted my heart. I knew God was speaking to me about our youth and about our hearts as we worshipped with them.

I can “*give* offense” and I can “*take* offense”. I’m convinced Jesus is not as offended as we are by how one generation worships him. In fact, I don’t think he “takes up” the offense at all. I think he smiles and welcomes “the little children,” those we think are maybe doing it wrong or don’t get it totally right. I think he lays his hands on them while many of us try and protect him from “bad” worship.

But Jesus wasn’t measuring the children’s worship or response to him according to the *disciples’* worship or understanding of him. Jesus welcomed the children from where they were at, because *he* wanted to bless them. His blessing wasn’t conditional on the disciple’s approval of the children.

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Jesus looks at our heart when he looks at our worship, our response, our offering. He doesn’t accept the giver on the basis of the gift, but the gift on the basis of the giver. We get caught up on things like lyrics and styles, on the precise balance between a song’s focus on “me” versus “Jesus,” on the exact count of the words “I” versus “God”. Yet, all the while, I’m convinced, Jesus is blessing “the little children” who are responding and coming to him in ways we think are misguided or shallow.

Is there a perfect balance of attention on me and on Jesus that must be achieved before Jesus is pleased with me and my worship? Is praise and worship primarily a matter of works that makes me acceptable, or is it primarily a matter of grace that says I am accepted? Worship “befits the upright” (Psalm 33:1), not “makes you upright”.

Long before “righteous” is a moral term, it is a relational term. We are frequently concerned with the morality of righteousness. But God is always concerned with the *relationship* of righteousness.

In the Psalms, the righteous are those who are so aware of their “frailty, finitude, and fallibleness,” that they are driven into the arms of grace and mercy. They become totally reliant on their relationship to God, on God’s relationship to them. As one commentator puts it, “the righteous are distinguished from the wicked mainly by their confession of helplessness...and therefore they seek refuge in the Lord.” Children are often helpless, dependent on their parents, on their relationship to their parents.

Worship is founded on and grounded in the truth that God has chosen you and brought you into relationship with himself. The condition for worshipping, then, is salvation, not theological expertise or Biblical mastery. Has he saved you? Then he has welcomed you. So worship him!

“Even the sparrow finds a home...at your altars, O Lord of Hosts” (Psalm 84:3). Even the sparrow is welcomed. It seems God’s standards are much lower than ours. Of course, not lower in the sense of dishonoring his name, or diminishing his glory, or dismissing his Word. But lower in the sense of “lowering the bar” and welcoming those who I may think have no demand on Jesus’s time and

attention. Why not? Because of personal and generational differences. Because of *cultural* preferences.

Christians today often despise culture and demean it, but when we do that we also despise and demean the *generations* who are born and born again for such a time and culture as this. And we despise and demean the *God* who creates those generations and the cultures he has placed them in. God is the God both of generations and of cultures. No single generation or culture or expression of worship is worth more than another, if we believe the Apostle Paul when he preached that God "made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined allotted periods and the boundaries of their dwelling place, that they should seek him" (Acts 17:26-27).



Every culture and generation is *unique*, not perfect. My generation does life and ministry within the context of a particular culture, as every generation does. So our youth and children will do life and ministry in the context of a culture particularly different from mine and yours. Should we prevent them from coming, with their particular culture's ways of dressing, singing, working, creating, planning, building, leading, serving, etc.?

Here's a test: If I were to dress according to the preferences of one of the generations represented in Elim Grace, which would *you* have me dress for?

How far am I, are we, willing to go to serve and welcome and reach and involve the generations after us? Are we willing to let the children, teens, young adults come and offer Jesus *their* music and singing from *their* heart? From where *they* are at? From the level of *their* knowledge, understanding, and pursuit of Jesus? Are we willing to listen to *their* ideas, welcoming their opinions and even trusting them to make decisions, even if their ideas are unlike ours, even if we don't like their ideas at all? Are we willing to allow them to grow in Christ while being a part of us, as opposed to waiting till they're grown to have a part?

We must work hard to not criticize those who are able to drink the milk of the Word for not being able to chew and digest the meat of the Word. With time, we all grow and mature in our knowledge

of Christ and in our Christlikeness. But we grow only as we continually (be)come like children. It would seem, then, that Jesus would be saying to us that if we ever lose that “bounce” in our step, like children have when they are running to someone they love, or if we ever lose that freedom from embarrassment, like children have when saying or doing things in the presence of someone they trust, if we ever lose our childlikeness, then we are missing out on the blessings of the kingdom, “for to such belongs the kingdom of heaven”. And that’s really what’s *at stake*: not worship, but *blessing*.

Jesus wants to bless every generation. He is every generation’s greatest blessing. So let none of us prevent any of us from coming to him. Rather, let each of us invite all of us to come to him together.

TOUCH DOWN: A SHIFT IN FOCUS

For over ten years now we have gathered together on the second Sunday night of every month for an extended time of praise and worship. Without question God has met each of us at different moments over the course of those years. Touch Down has been a night many of us have looked forward to. And we will continue to look forward to it. But the *focus* of our gathering for Touch Down is going to shift.

Its focus is going to be on *baptisms*. This means we will be having Touch Down *when* we have baptisms.

This shift will highlight the importance and necessity of baptism as a personal act of faith and obedience in the life of every disciple of Jesus. Its a powerful moment, and Touch Down will be all about celebrating God’s work of grace and salvation in those lives.



This shift, I hope, will increase anticipation and momentum for our time together at Touch Down. It will be a “special occasion” and help us see and testify to God’s work in our midst. If we only have one Touch Down a year, what might that mean? But if we have one every month, what might that mean? We should pray for and expect Jesus to grow his church and build his kingdom by saving the lost and, therefore, we should rejoice and expect baptisms. Jesus commanded us to “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them” (Matthew 28:16). This shift is an effort to obey his command.

ELIM GRACE APP

Our Elim Grace App launches this month! An app will give us greater reach and flexibility in communication and engagement, including but not limited to: updates and reminders; sign-ups for small groups, baptisms, events; instant access to sermons, sermon notes, small group questions, blog posts, study resources; secure and simpler giving; the ability to share with friends from within the app.

The App will be *a* tool, not *the* tool. The reality is that we've reached a tipping point in that more people than not are using smart phones/apps. Yet, the app will be one of *many* ways we are trying to communicate. At (Dave) Ramsay Solutions they have a saying: To be unclear is to be unkind. We want to be as kind as possible! So we want an abundance of communication tools in our toolbox: the website, facebook, instagram, the Vision Forward, the "3 Things you need to know around Elim" weekly email, our Sunday services, and now the app. We hope you will find it helpful and even fun!