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# VISION FORWARD

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## REFLECTIONS OF AN ELIM GRACE INTERN

### “DESTINY”

My time at Elim Grace has forever changed my life. This may sound like an overstatement to some, but there is really no other way I could define my experience at Elim. I did not imagine my time here would have such a big impact in life. And I definitely did not expect to end up loving this church the way I do in just a year.

I remember when I first arrived that I had two different feelings. On the one hand, I was completely loving it. I was out of college, I got my first job, and I had an apartment with a kitchen, which meant I could make quesadillas whenever I wanted. My first days here felt kind of dreamy: I already loved the Evans family and now I could see them more often; I was working doing things I love in an

environment I love with people I love; and I was getting paid for that! I was so thankful for the opportunity.

On the other hand, I couldn't help but to ask myself if this was the place I was supposed to be. Before I came here, I asked for a job at Elim Bible Institute and they told me they didn't have a position available. At the same time, my roommate and his soon-to-be wife got an offer to be the next interns at Elim

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Grace. They already had other plans, though, so they had to decline. And then, one day, I got a text from Jonathan asking if I would be interested in doing an internship at Elim Grace. You could say that I was asked to take this job because my friends had to decline, and that I was free to accept this job because the school couldn't hire me.

God used this situation to teach me that *my destiny is where I am*, and that He put me here with a purpose. This gave such a peace and enabled me to give everything to this church. I didn't have to lose time and energy looking for my destiny—this was it. If you haven't experienced this reality, I encourage you to pray for it. Once you realize that the place you are in is the place God called you to, suddenly you don't feel the need to look for another church or a better place. Instead, you are freed to be an active part in what God is doing right where you are. This doesn't mean that nothing will ever change, but that while you are looking into the future you are firmly planted in what God is doing right now where you are. Though you know a different season may come, your focus and strength is in the season God is giving you right now.

## “SEASONS”

This was such a foreign concept to me. If you would have asked me a year ago how many seasons I've experienced in life, I would have answered two: living in Mexico and moving to the United States. I thought that you only went into a different season when everything around you changed, but this past year taught me different. This kind of thinking is now far gone, as my year here in Oswego was, so far, the year with the most seasons I've ever lived through.

***Know the season you are living in and decide to purposefully be a part of it***

As I was moving here, I knew my year was going to be a season in itself. I felt that once my time here was over I was supposed to go back to Mexico. What I did not expect was that while I was living in this season, I was going to experience many other seasons. I experienced a season of getting used to living on my own for the first time; the season of transition of a church from one season to another as Jonathan took the

position of the new lead pastor of Elim Grace; I even experienced the actual seasons of the year changing from summer to autumn, autumn to Oswego's winter (which is definitely different than any other kind of winter!), winter to spring, and finally back to summer.

Something I realized with the seasons of the year is that the way people live changes, yet there were some things that remain unchanged. You realize that going out with a sweater is not enough, and you change the way you dress. You start wearing boots instead of sneakers, and you stay longer at home than you do in the summer. I thought everything was changing, but soon I realized that some things did not change. I still had to go to work, kids still had to go to school, and you still had to keep life moving, even though it felt easier to stay in bed drowning in blankets.

As Christians, when we go through different seasons, there are things that have to change in our life. A season to focus on your work, to move to another city, to pursue a dream. These changes help us to grow and to keep our lives moving. At the same time, there are things that remain no matter the season. Not everything in our life is a variable. If it were, it would be mess. Our relationship with God has to be a constant if we want our lives to be like the house on the rock. This is not to say that our relationship with God will always be the same. Sometimes, for example, the way we spend time with God changes or the focus of our prayer changes. But as long as we are in relationship with Him, though seasons will move things around us, they won't move us.

Saying this, I encourage you to *know the season you are living in* and decide to purposefully be a part of it. Don't get stuck in the last season, or become so impatient for the next season that you miss out on the beauty the present season brings. As a church, remember to support each other in your own season and to recognize the season you are going through as a church, giving your faith, love, and effort to the vision of the church.

## “GRACIAS”

When I think on my time here, I am amazed by how much I've learned. Not only about ministry, but about the community, generosity, and love that the people of Elim Grace live by. Keep being the church God has called you to be, with a broken heart for the lost, a willing heart for the church, and a surrendered heart to God.



I have nothing but thankfulness in my heart for Elim Grace and every single person that made me feel loved without expecting anything in return. You have such a heart and I'm happy to call this place home and you my family. I know that the fruit of my life will be because of the seeds this church has planted. Thank you for investing in my life and for supporting me as I take the next step.

I believe God has great things planned for this church and I am so excited for the future of Elim Grace. I don't believe this is goodbye, but, rather, see you later, as I pray that the relationships I built here will remain even if God has put me somewhere else.

*Ricardo*

## A RETURN BEYOND IMAGINATION AND MEASURE

The uninvested life is an unfruitful life. Your returns are minimal. But if you invest your life—your time, energy, resources—into the life of another, you will enjoy unimaginable return. Yet, not always in ways you can measure or predict.

I grew up in a home that was always welcoming of others. So did my wife, Alissa. It wasn't only that when people showed up uninvited they were welcomed in, but also that we deliberately pursued others, inviting and welcoming them in. Often many of these people would come from far away and

stay with us for a long time—weeks, months, years. As a result, my sisters and I often grew to love them. But that love often would lead to the pain of saying goodbye. Many of those who came ended up leaving and it was hard, even painful, knowing you might never see them again.



Was it worth it? Absolutely.

Alissa and I have likewise endeavored to live this way. It takes a while to remember and to count all the people who have come into our home and lives and became part of our family. As a result, my children have often grown close and come to love many of them. But as a result I've also watched them hurt and cry when saying goodbye. And I am thankful for both experiences. I wouldn't trade that joy or that sorrow for anything. They learned to love, to welcome, to be hospitable. Their lives are richer because of each of those experiences.

Even so, would it be easier, safer, more comfortable, and less painful not to invite and welcome anybody into our home, into our life? Yes. But we would be far poorer because of it.

Not only in our homes, but in our church: we welcome those who show up uninvited and we welcome those we invite to come. Throughout the years we've said goodbye to many who have come and poured their lives into Elim Grace. We're far richer because of it and I believe they are, too. Our internship program is intended to be an opportunity for those entering full time ministry to receive mentoring and practical training, but it has often been an opportunity for you and for me to be enriched by those God sends and entrusts to us. We are far better because they came than we would be if they had not.

We will continue to invite and welcome young men, like Ricardo, and young women in the future. I thank you for investing in Ricardo's life and future. And I encourage all of us to ask for the gift of hospitality, in our homes and in our church. Let us love one another. We know it will be hard to say goodbye, but the fruit of the return on the investment will far exceed what they or we could measure.

*Pastor Jonathan*