

---

# VISION FORWARD

---



## BUT IS ABORTION GOOD?

*I am certain in a church our size that there are women who have had an abortion. If that is you, before you read the rest of what I've written, I want you to know this: you are loved and you are accepted here. If I could look you in the eyes, I would tell you that I don't want you to leave. I don't know the circumstances that led you to your decision, but I do know this, that to those who are tired and weary of life and heart Jesus says, "Come and I will give you rest." You will find grace in Jesus Christ, not condemnation.*

Is abortion a women's right? That isn't the question. Is abortion wrong? That isn't the question either. The question is, "But is abortion good?" Dear Christian, we ask this question not as Americans, not as Republicans or Democrats, not as Conservatives or Liberals, but as *Christians*.

When my wife Alissa was pregnant with our first son, Joshua, medical complications surfaced that put her and the baby at risk. One of the possibilities was that our son could be born with a developmental disability. The doctor at the time repeatedly said that, considering the longterm quality of life for the baby and "its" impact on us, we should consider abortion. Today Joshua is 17 years old, a high school swimmer, excelling in history, and at the top of his welding class.

However, he was born at 32 weeks weighing just 4 pounds. He was in the NICU at University Hospital for two weeks, where a team of doctors and nurses did all that was necessary to protect and ensure his life. Do you know how grateful we were that specialized equipment and expert professionals were ready, willing, and able to serve all of us in that way? Since then medicine and technology have grown our capacity and ability to protect and treat babies in and out of the womb in astounding ways.

It doesn't take a lot of creativity, skill, or knowledge to take a life. But the amount of creativity, skill, and knowledge that goes into and has gone into saving a life is, we might even say, *miraculous*. One has only to spend a few minutes researching the medical advancements made in the last 20 years and you can only marvel. If God is the giver of all good things, including wisdom for technological advancement (Isaiah 28:23-29), should we be surprised at the amazement we feel for what people do and can do to save and care for one life? And, conversely, should we be surprised at the recoil we experience at what people do to take a life? No one has ever said that *death* was miraculous. We are naturally attracted to and celebrate life, not death. To be attracted to death and to celebrate it would be an indication that something not good is at work within us.

This past month New York State passed a law expanding abortion rights to mothers, giving them the choice to abort their full term babies right up to their due date. There was much celebration over the power of choice. We, however, at Elim Grace hold as one of our core values, "**Human Life: We are committed to upholding the sanctity of all human life from conception onward**". We celebrate the gift of life. This value is rooted in our conviction that God is good, as He has revealed himself to be in His Word, both the written Word and in His Son, the Word of God made flesh. And it is also rooted in how we naturally respond and testify to the glory of God's goodness at work in creation, the world, and human beings.

A famous theory asks: is something good because it is good or is something good because God says it is good? The answer to both is intended to disprove an objective morality. If something is good because it is good, then there is an extrinsic or external standard of truth outside of God. He is, then, not the creator of that standard, but Himself holds to it. On the other hand, if something is good because God says it is good, it would mean God could arbitrarily say something is good when it's not or, worse, could call something which is evil good and so deceive us. But as Christians we hold that what is good is defined by God's *inherent and intrinsic goodness*. We believe that there is neither an external standard of goodness to Himself nor that is He intrinsically able to call evil good.

Goodness is that which benefits. Goodness makes us better. It heals, restores, improves, strengthens, enriches, enlivens us. Goodness works towards this. Goodness seeks the good in, of, and for another, which is what love also is and does. Love "does not insist on its own way...does not rejoice in wrongdoing (1 Corinthians 13:4-8) If God is good and God is love, then these *benefits* are some of the attributes that He is in Himself and that we can identify His works by.

All that is opposed to His goodness or distorts His goodness or seeks to destroy His goodness we must call evil. So if God created humanity in His goodness and in His image, and called humanity not good but "very good" (Genesis 1:26-31), then we cannot treat humanity or some portion of humanity as not good or less than in the good likeness of the image of God.

Now, no one may be calling a baby evil, but are we calling that baby good, inherently good according to the inherent goodness of the God who creates and gives life to all human beings? As Christians we believe not that a man and woman ultimately are the creator of a human being, but that God is. To abort a baby, then, is to take the life God gave—someone and something intrinsic to the goodness of who God is and what God does. When we experience God's goodness we naturally respond, "Thank you." Abortion is saying, "No thank you."

Again, you and I are neither a Republican, Democrat, or Conservative who happens to be Christian. We are Christians who may or may not be Republican, Democrat, or Conservative. But as Christians we are “in Christ” *first*. Our greatest and highest identity is in and with Jesus Christ. “Jesus is Lord” is a political statement, one that provides the moral framework for how we live our whole life in all of its parts.

God's law, Jesus said, is summed up in two great commandments: you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and you shall love your neighbor as yourself (Matthew 22:37-40). We are speaking of two commandments, but *not* of two kinds of love. There is one love that begins with God, then transforms our heart, and finally is made concrete in our love for our neighbor.

When wrestling through our political/life choices we can run all our thinking and feeling through this matrix: do I love God through this choice, do I love my neighbor through this choice, and do I love myself through this choice.

Ask yourself this as a Christian: is abortion a way of loving God? is it a way of loving myself? is it a way of loving my neighbor? Whatever we choose to do in life must answer *yes* to all *three* of these questions.

If my love for my self and my love for my neighbor are of equal value in God's eyes, are of the same kind of love, then they are equal to each other. In other words, I cannot love myself and hate my neighbor. Neither can I hate myself and love my neighbor. But if I love God I will find that I love myself as God loves me and that I love my neighbor as God loves them. For those who are in Christ, the love of God purifies all other loves. The love of God makes us good and the goodness of God makes us love.

My love for God/self/neighbor has never compelled me to sign a pro-life /anti-abortion petition appealing to the state or to Washington. But it *has* led me to foster children and to adopt a little girl. This is how I fight against abortion. But more importantly this is one way I aspire to the goodness of God. How will you fight? How do you aspire?

The goodness of God will compel all of us to *be* good, it will inspire each of us to *do* good. Why? Jesus loved us and gave himself up for us, dying for our sin on the cross. He cried out forsaken by God in our place, so that we might never know the full horror of being completely separated from God. In Jesus we are fully forgiven, welcomed, and accepted into the eternal love of God. And now as children of God who are protected, cared for, loved, and showered with His goodness, we go out into all the world listening for the cry of Jesus from the least of these: the abandoned, forsaken, needy, sick, poor, prisoner, motherless, fatherless, oppressed, unborn. We who were found must now go to seek those who are lost.

Dear Elim Grace, let's not do evil. And let's not forsake doing good. But let us overcome evil by doing good for all. Let our behavior say what we believe; let our actions embody our message. “Beloved brethren, we are philosophers not in words but in deeds; we exhibit our wisdom not by our dress, but by truth; we know virtues by their practice rather than through boasting of them; we do not speak great things but we live them.” (Cyprian, Bishop of Carthage in North Africa, 256 AD)

## SERVE OSWEGO 2019

In May of 2018 we launched our “Serve Oswego” project. With a team of 100 volunteers of all ages we spread out over four locations on the West side of the city and partnered with our DPW department to clean up for the Spring. The DPW was very thankful and surprised at the amount of work we were able to accomplish. After our work was finished, many of us went to The Connection Point for a breakfast together. It was a great experience, so this year we are expanding Serve Oswego.

I recently met with our Mayor and in my time with him I presented the idea of redirecting our Serve Oswego resources and efforts towards cleaning up after the Bridge Street Run in May. He thought that was a great idea! It will require us to cover Bridge Street and connecting streets and nearby parks. To help us accomplish this goal, I will put the call out to other local churches (and maybe a few organizations). I especially have in mind smaller churches who may or may not have the resources to do something like this and would perhaps love the opportunity to join us.

Rather than gathering together after at The Connection Point, this year we will set up tents in the civic square and make food and coffee available there for everyone. Doing this will mean getting permission for the use of public space. This will involve my attending a Common Council meeting, which would likely be broadcast, so potentially a lot of people will hear about Serve Oswego and some will decide to join us.

Serve Oswego will take place on Saturday, May 11 (8-11am). The closer we get, we'll map out and plan how we'll organize our 100+ volunteers. That's right! We need to surpass our 100 volunteers from last year, so please help spread the word and recruit all you can. We GET to serve our city.

## 2019 WILDLY IMPORTANT GOALS

In November of last year I wrote and asked all our Elim Ministry Leaders to pray, think, and talk with their teams about what would be one or two “wildly important goals” (WIGs) for 2019. Here are some of their WIGs:

**ELIM WORSHIP** (Steve Davis, Shelly King): Our Wildly important goal for 2019 is for our team and our congregation to grow in great FREEDOM. That we would all be quick to enter into worship with all that we are and all that we have CONSISTENTLY. We are passionate about growing new worship leaders and new team members. We'd love to see the birth of original songs. If we had to pick a phrase for the team for 2019 it would be, “Hearts on Fire.”

**ELIM WOMEN** (Ann-marie King): To learn to see with the heart, eyes and mind of Christ. That we would learn to sit at the feet of Jesus. To undergird the work of our church with our time talents and treasures. To teach and disciple women of all ages by providing opportunities to receive, enjoy, mentor, and serve each generation. To stimulate spiritual growth and service in one another.

**ELIM MEN** (Cas Usiatynski): For the men to meet more often to build consistency and depth in their walk with Christ.

**ELIM SERVICE HOSTS** (Dan Ignacio, Vikki Woods): ENGAGE. As greeters we are the first to engage people as they come through the doors. We are the ones that can make that first welcoming impression. And we also want to engage our Elim Partners and all who consistently attend to become engaged in serving.

ELIM SOUND & MEDIA (Mike Conway): identify, recruit, and train two new members for the sound and media team. The deadline to complete this by June 1, 2019.

ELIM HOSPITALITY (Ann Monroe, Charmaine Laliveres): Making people feel welcome, safe, and helping our team connect with whomever they are serving in a real and genuine way.

ELIM KIDS/NURSERY (Alissa Evans): To increase and expand our staff and to identify, train, and release new leaders.

ELIM YOUTH (Chad Summer): To connect with our teens as consistently as possible, grow and expand our leadership team, and establish a youth worship team.