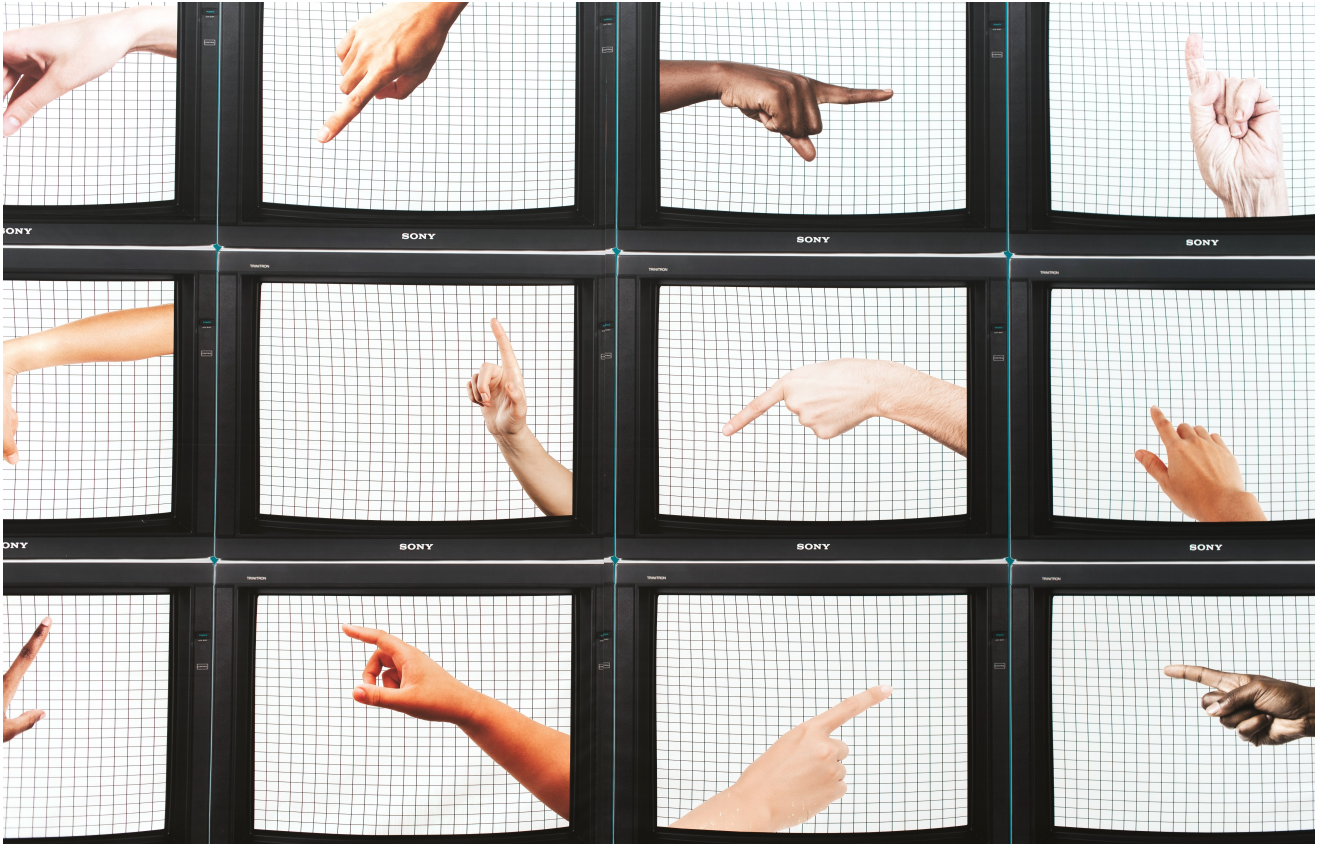


VISION FORWARD



I AM A COMMUNICATOR, NOT A TALKER, OF THE GOSPEL

I want us to be a church known for a few specific things. And by known I mean the best at what we can do. I want us to be known for our attention to the needs of our city. We don't hide our heads in the sand of the church, strangers to the culture we live in. We get up, get out, and get to work in the areas God has called us to with courage and passion.

If God is with us, and not simply above us and around us, then the needs of our community that correspond to God's heart for our community will move our heart to action. And he will move with us. His power and love will equip us to do both work that is good (what is just, righteous, merciful) and work that is well done (with excellence, skill, beauty).

Along with being known for our work, I want us also to be known for our communication.

I am passionate about good, effective, excellent communication. I am convinced that good communication can bring life and joy, whereas bad communication can bring misery, division, and confusion.

EFFORT

I don't like to talk. Small talk is not something that comes easy to me. I have had to learn to have a conversation. Alissa has taught me everything I know and that's because she DOES love to communicate! But communication is more than saying something.

Saying something is easy. Communicating is more difficult, but in the long run more fruitful. If I say to Alissa, "Babe, you look beautiful," but I say it without looking at her or in a rush, what am I communicating **behind** what I'm saying? I don't see her, I don't really notice her. Communication is the effort behind what I'm saying. It equals words plus actions. It means there is no separation between my words and my actions.

When Jesus says, "I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you" (John 14:18), is he just saying words or is he communicating something with/in his words? The effort behind what he is saying is massive: he is investing himself into his words. He will live and die and rise again to communicate this to us. So we are not simply saying words to our community like "we are here to serve you". We are with great effort investing ourselves into our words. We communicate **with** our very lives.

Talk is cheap when there is no effort behind what is said. God's grace in Christ was not cheap, but costly. As such we **can't** communicate the gospel of costly grace without pouring our lives out in a real tangible demonstration of it. Dallas Willard used to say, "Grace is opposed to earning, but not to effort." This kind of communication is not for the fainthearted, the rushed, the self-centered, nor the disinterested. It is for those who are willing to lay down their lives for others by the grace of God.

EMPATHY

Saying something to someone involves only knowing what you think/feel. Communicating with someone involves knowing what they think/feel. It is steeped in empathy. Unless a teabag is steeped in water, all its rich flavor and aroma will remain locked up. If you allow your communication to steep in empathy, it will become full of flavor and aroma.

Empathy is putting yourself in another person's shoes. You might not like their shoes: you might think they're too ugly, too cheap, too old, too smelly, too small, or too big, but if you really care about what they think and feel, and if you really care about being a good communicator, then you will take off your shoes and find a way into theirs.

Let this be written on our hearts: I am called to be a communicator of the gospel, not a talker of the gospel. We don't talk about the good news of Jesus Christ; we communicate it to a needy, broken, desperate, hurting, lost world in the power of the Holy Spirit and the love of God. Anyone can quote John 3:16. Anyone can say God is love. Anyone can make a point. But not everyone will live out John 3:16, will demonstrate God's love, will make a difference by investing their life in another.

How often we think, "All that matters is that I tell the truth." No! Good, clear, empathetic communication is **second** about telling the truth or saying what needs to be said. It is **first** about seeing, noticing, caring for, knowing, and serving the person you want to communicate with. Good communication, then, is impossible without first becoming a good communicator. There is no communication without communion and no communion without communication. How do we know we're in the presence of a good communicator? We say things like, "They really know me". Are people saying this about me? About you? About us?

Good, empathetic communication is attractive. And a good, empathetic communicator communicates in attractive ways. Why? How? Because words come from the heart, and a good heart is attractive and will communicate in attractive ways. A good heart is full of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness,

faithfulness, gentleness, self-control, empathy, not arrogance, criticism, enmity, anger, strife, jealousy, rivalry, dissension, division, or busyness. A good heart will communicate with words and in ways that are like drops of honey, not with words and in ways that are like sword thrusts. If Jesus and his words, which flow from his heart, dwell richly in us and in our hearts, then it can truly be said of us by others that to them our words are “sweet to my taste” and “sweeter than honey” (Psalm 19:10; 119:103).

TRUST

There is nothing, perhaps, so sweet as the knowledge that the one who is speaking to you is trustworthy. Nothing undermines or reinforces communication like trust. Why? Because, again, we cannot separate our words from our person.

Every word has an entire history behind it. If I say to Alissa, you can trust me, or I’ll be home on time, or I love you, she not only hears what I say, but in that moment knows whether or not my actions have been true to those words in the past. If we don’t listen to each other’s words, it may be because we don’t trust each other’s heart. If our community, if our neighbor, doesn’t listen to our words, it may be because they don’t trust our heart. But if they can trust our heart, then they will trust our words.

A man is his word. A woman is her word. A church is its word. And we, Elim Grace, must be true to our word. God is true to his Word: I AM who I say I AM. Since God’s words are an extension of himself to us and to the world, both in his written Word and in his Word made flesh, Jesus Christ, then our words are an extension not only of our ourselves but also of him who is alive, living, and being formed in us. May we be true, always true, to him! Let there be no separation between nor disintegration of who we are and who we are in Christ. Let us be united to Christ as his disciples, as his church. Let our lives be marked by the integrity of his word and action. Let our lives be full of the life and joy of the Father, Spirit, and Son.

God dwells in the happy land of the Trinity—the Father, Spirit, and Son living in unbroken communication/communion with each other. The only time God ever knew silence, interruption of communication, brokenness of communion was on the cross. It was there that Jesus endured full separation from the Father’s communion. It was then that he was cut off completely from the life and joy of God. It was his death for our sin. It was him so that we might never know the total absence of God from our lives. On the cross Jesus opened up the way for us to enter into the unbroken communication/communion of the life and joy of God forever. He brings us in. Our communication of the good news, then, is the outflow of that active and living relationship we now have with God. Communication is life. Let us open our mouths and hearts wide and ask God to fill us again and again.

UPCOMING SEMINAR: Sex trafficking and Internet Safety

In 5-10 years sex trafficking will become the largest criminal organization in the world, overtaking drug trafficking. It is the fastest growing enterprise on the planet. Its reach extends beyond urban to rural areas. And what it looks like is multi-faceted. Our county and community are not escaping its grip.

What it looks like and who it impacts is something we all must be aware of. It is not enough to protect our own. We must seek to rescue those who have no protection and are vulnerable.

On Wednesday night, April 17th (6:30-7:45pm), I invite every adult and teen to join us for a seminar on sex trafficking and internet safety. Leading the seminar will be Jessica Westberry. Jessica is Assistant Director for Prevention Support Partners of Oswego County as well as the outreach and prevention advocate for the Child Advocacy Center of Oswego County. Jessica is passionate about fighting sex trafficking in our community and is devoting much of her time and energy to writing and creating new systems and pathways for those in Oswego County caught in sex trafficking but with no clear way out.

The internet plays a significant role in trafficking. This is cause for alarm, but not fear. Since the internet and our devices are an ingrained part of our life and culture, we can and must learn to live with them. Some of what Jessica will teach will help point out dangers on the internet we may or may not be aware of, which will in turn help us and our children use this tool with greater wisdom and benefit.

This seminar lines up with our attempts to reach those looking for a way out of drug addiction (The Desens house), those looking for help in their recovery (Celebrate Recovery), those children looking for love and security (foster care training), those babies pre-born and young single mothers (Pregnancy Care Center) and those looking for hope in prison (Oswego jail ministry).

The needs around us are overwhelming, but to rescue one life, to reach one of the least of these, to save one sheep, as Jesus taught and showed us, is cause for enormous celebration.

COMMUNICATION RESOURCES

At some point this year I will be continuing our leadership training from 2018 by offering a course on communication. We will look at:

- What is communication
- Who are we communicating with
- What kind of a communicator am I
- What am I saying (content)
- How will I say it (structure)
- What do I want people to know, feel, and do
- What do I do when I fail (how do I keep learning, growing, and developing)

Over the course of the class, individuals will have the opportunity to select a topic and prepare a short presentation. The last two classes will be devoted to each person making their presentation, first, to a small group for feedback and, last, to the whole class. It will be fun! I promise!

In addition to this upcoming class, here are some recommended practical resources for becoming a better communicator now:

LISTEN:

Craig Groeschel Leadership Podcast, "Sharpening your communication skills" part 1 and 2
 EntreLeadership Podcast, #284, Carmine Gallo—The No. 1 Skill You Need Now
 Your favorite preachers, teachers, comedians, presenters

READ:

Communicating For A Change by Andy Stanley
 Five Stars by Carmine Gallo
 Resonate by Nancy Duarte
 Preaching by Timothy Keller

WATCH:

Jim Collins, Jim's Seven Questions: Learning from young leaders
 Simon Sinek, Why good leaders make you feel safe
 TED talks on any subject of interest