
VISION FORWARD



3 THINGS I CAN'T APOLOGIZE FOR

“Don’t apologize for these things.” That’s what I heard in my spirit during a few minutes of prayer. What were those things? *The prophetic, freedom in worship, and a love for the lost.*

Why do I believe God spoke those words to me? Because I confess there have been times when I’ve wanted to pursue those things more, but have held back because I was more concerned with who might disagree or dislike it. So this moment in prayer was for me a moment of both correction and exhortation.

To say I can longer apologize for these things is a personal statement, *not* an Elim Grace statement. However, to say this *is* to say it as the pastor of Elim Grace. It has and will have an impact on how I pastor and lead. I hope, though, this isn’t a surprise or cause for alarm. You have “known me” now for 19 years. In other words, these things have always been there in the background. They are the same convictions under which I have been operating/ministering since the beginning. I see now, though,

that they are coming into clearer focus. They are moving forward from the background to the foreground.

THE HOLY SPIRIT

I said above “the prophetic”. I’ve expanded it to say “The Holy Spirit”. The gift of prophecy is the gift and operation of the Holy Spirit. But it is only one of His gifts. I want all that He wants to give me and us. I want the fullness of His operation in both His gifts and His fruit, His power and His presence. The prophetic word in particular, though, is near and dear to my heart.

When I was a young boy and then a teenager, it was the personal prophetic word/voice of the Lord to me that began to shift my feet and open the eyes of my heart to Jesus. And it has been in large part over the years that through the prophetic word my love for Jesus, His kingdom, and His church has continued to grow. In fact, there is one prophetic word given to me in the days between leaving my home and arriving at Elim Bible institute in 1997 which has yet to come to pass, but which fills me with great hope, courage, and joy in life and in ministry.

What is prophecy? Prophecy is “one speaking for another”. A prophetic word from the Lord is the Lord speaking through or by another. God is the Author of what is spoken, not the speaker. For the speaker, it’s the ear, not the tongue, that’s most important. It’s the purity of their heart, not the eloquence of their speech when receiving and giving a prophetic word.

So the Lord speaks prophetically. But why? To *affirm* us as His children and to encourage us in our relationship with Him. To *confirm* something we have already begun to hear or to see from Him in the secret of our heart. To *correct* us when we are in error or going astray, not to judge us and put an end to us. The Spirit of Jesus is to change us, not destroy us. To *impart* to us strength, power, encouragement, even spiritual gifts for what He has called us to do. To *predict* or to speak of something before it happens. The Lord knows the future.

We want and need the prophetic word of God, the prophetic voice of Jesus, the prophetic gift of the Holy Spirit in our services. We aim to cultivate it, to teach about it, and to train in it. We are and are going to be a prophetic church.

FREEDOM IN WORSHIP

I still remember the first time I played the keyboard in a church service. My dad had been encouraging me to “get up” and begin to play, but I was too nervous and afraid. So at the end of one his sermons, he stopped, looked for me in the back, and asked me to come up and play. From the pulpit! In front of everyone! What was I supposed to do? And that’s how it all began.

For the last 30 years I have been involved in worship ministry one way or another. Yet, becoming a *worshipper* took a little while longer than becoming a keyboard player. I remember my heart longing to worship Jesus during our services. I remember the tug on my heart to clap and raise my hands, and the equal tug of my nerves and the awkwardness of doing something like that in public. Eventually I broke free and raised my hands a little, and something broke free in me.

I long for freedom in worship, the same kind of freedom I experienced that night, the same freedom that has continued both to grow in me and to grow *me*. I am a worship leader. Though I no longer view myself as the main worship leader on the Elim Worship ministry team, I *do* view myself as the one who should go first in worshipping. I love to praise and worship Jesus, and as

your pastor I want to lead the way in that every time we gather. I'm on the front row during our times of worship for this very reason. You may or may not express yourself in worship like I do, but I want to encourage you to begin to express *your* worship to Jesus.

Praise and worship is not about feeling something, but praise and worship does shape our feelings. In fact, worship shapes everything about us. Worship is the action of orienting ourselves around God and it involves our mind, heart, and even our body. In worship we give our full attention to God and find that God shapes our thoughts, desires, emotions, and our actions. In many ways, only what is "put in" through our worship can "come out" transformed.

If you want your thoughts to change, put your mind into your worship. If you want your words to change, put your mouth into your worship. If you want your emotions and desires to change, put your heart into your worship. If you want your actions and habits to change, put your body into your worship.

We are and are going to be a "charismatic" church. We have a "charismatic" theology, yes. But we will also have a "charismatic" or expressive style of worship. We are not simply organizing a sing along on Sundays. Our worship teams are not simply leading or singing songs *for* us. They are leading us to *join* them in worship. Worship is and is going to be interactive. We will all be encouraged every Sunday to sing, clap, raise our hands, and more in our praise and worship of Jesus. We will seek freedom in the Spirit and freedom in our spirit to do this.

A LOVE FOR THE LOST

If I think back over my life, I always had friends who neither went to church nor were Christians. But this stopped once I got to Bible School and moved to Oswego. It wasn't until 2-3 years ago that I began to *seek* and to develop friendships with the unchurched and nonbeliever. I always preached *about* loving the lost, but it wasn't until I had friends who *were* lost that I came to *know* what that love was.

Do we love the lost, those who are far away from Jesus? It's important that we clarify what we mean by this. We do not mean that when we love the lost we love them as *potential Christians*. No. We mean that when we love the lost we love them as *people*. Sometimes we forget that behind the label "lost" or "unbeliever" there's an actual human being *like me*. Until you love someone as they are, where they are, you cannot begin to love *them*. You can only love the person that *is* in front of you. If we don't, as Jesus did so many times, enter someone's home (and life) and/or invite someone into ours, who is not a Christian, then how can we come to really know them and to truly love them?

99.9% of my preaching and writing makes a beeline for the cross. I long more than anything to see people come to Christ and be made new. And I can honestly say that when I now preach the cross, how and what I feel towards the lost is very different than what it once was. I *know* a love for them—it fills my heart—because I've come to *know* them.

All across the world our great hope is that men and women everywhere will be drawn to Jesus and will follow Him and put their faith in Him as their Lord and Savior. But at the center of it all is not God's distant, cold, angry, disinterested love for humanity. It's His down-to-earth, inviting, forgiving, and embracing love for humanity.

We are and are going to be a church that loves the lost, meaning, we are going to be a church that seeks to know them and to be known by them. We will strive to speak and bring God's grace to every part of the human condition. We will invite and welcome, seek and serve, help and bless, all we can with the love of Christ. No strings attached. Of course, we cannot in any real sense love *all* the lost, as Jesus does, since He knows *every* heart. But we can love some by getting to know a few. One is not a number too small for Jesus. (Luke 15:4)

UPCOMING VOLUNTEER CELEBRATION EVENT

In the works is our first ever Volunteer Celebration Event. If you currently volunteer within Elim Grace, and contribute during our Sunday services in particular, or in another way to our church life, we want to celebrate YOU! You are Elim Grace, you are "a place of pouring out". So we want to thank you for serving Jesus, for serving His church, and for serving all who walk through our doors.

Our event—YOUR EVENT—is scheduled for Saturday, June 1st, 2-5pm. It will be held at Camp Hollis and great food will be provided by Provisions Catering. There will be team games and activities, a bounce house for kids, and even a few awards. Our heart is to bless you, our volunteer, so we hope that you will be able to attend.

If you are a spouse who volunteers, or you are a parent who volunteers, your whole family is invited to join you. Please RSVP ASAP at elimgrace@gmail.com.

RESOURCES

I love books that help me better understand and shape my habits. If you're a reader, here are a few that have had a practical impact as of late:

- 1) Chasing Excellence, Ben Bergeron
- 2) Atomic Habits: An Easy & Proven Way to Build New Habits & Break Old Ones, James Clear
- 3) Switch: How to Change Things When Change is Hard, Chip & Dan Heath
- 4) Peak Performance, Brad Stulberg & Steve Magness
- 5) Extreme Ownership: How Navy Seals Lead & Win, Jocko Willink & Leif Babin
- 6) Mindset, Carol Dweck
- 7) The Ideal Team Player, Patrick Lencioni
- 8) Deep Work: Rules for Focused Success in a Distracted World, Cal Newport