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# VISION FORWARD

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## FOR A MOMENT THERE IS PRUNING

A long time passes between a seed being planted and fruit being harvested. The moment of planting is memorable: you drop a seed from your hand into the ground and cover it up. The moment of harvesting is also memorable: you take fruit into your hand from off the branch and taste it.

But there is another memorable and significant moment in the life of a tree or a vine: pruning. “Every branch in me that does not bear fruit he takes away, and every branch that does bear fruit he prunes that it may bear more fruit.” (John 15:2) We are, I believe, entering into a season of pruning.

Are we ready for it? Are we ready for *Him*?

### ***THE FRUITFUL BRANCH***

A vine exists to bear fruit. That is what it does. It is not only desirable but imperative that it does. Jesus is the True Vine: the locus, source, center of God’s people and God’s life. The branch doesn’t have to reach heaven; the Vine came down to earth. As disciples of Jesus, as His church, He has

stooped down and drawn us up into Himself and His abundant life. We abide in Him now, and He in us, and together we bear fruit. His very own life is pulsating through us. But...

The most productive and fruitful disciple—and church—is the one pruned by God who is the Vinedresser. Our life in Him must be trimmed and cultivated. We can go from a barren wilderness to a beautiful garden only under His watchful eye and skillful hand.

### **THE PRUNED BRANCH**

For the moment, then, there *has* to be pruning. We should not be surprised that times of pruning have or will come. Pruning is in many ways “good news,” since it means we are healthy and already bearing good fruit. If it is “bad news,” it is only in the sense that it causes pain. We must remember, though, that in every season the Vinedresser wants the vine to succeed. The sharpest tool in the hands of a careful surgeon is still a good thing.

But only for a *moment* there is pruning. “Weeping may tarry for the night, but joy comes with the morning.” (Psalm 30:5) This “light momentary affliction” of pruning is preparing for us, and preparing us for, a measure of the eternal glory of God. To be pruned is a momentous act of God’s grace towards us. Through it we taste and see new dimensions of God’s goodness.

### **THE CLEANED BRANCH**

There is a difference between what God “takes away” and what He “prunes”. He cuts off and “takes away” what is not bearing fruit; it’s not connected to or abiding in the Vine (John 15:6). To be pruned is to be cut back, but not cut *off*.

When God “prunes” it means He “trims clean”. The same meaning is found when Jesus told His disciples that they were “clean” (13:10). He had done a cleansing work in their hearts and lives. Pruning, then, is a cleaning or clearing away of the woods, of the excess, of any and every debris or obstruction in the way of further growth in Christ. “Left to itself a vine will produce a good deal of unproductive growth.” (Leon Morris)

You see? We as disciples, we as Elim Grace, *must* undergo routine cleaning and pruning, so that *the Vine* can produce and bear new and more fruit in us.

How does the pruning/cleansing occur? Through the words of Jesus abiding in us. Through us putting on our new life in Jesus. Through the presence and power of Jesus energizing and strengthening us from within. As Paul preaches, “It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me.” (Galatians 2:20) So, “I can do all things through him who strengthens me.” (Phil. 4:13)

It happens as the Holy Spirit comes to search our hearts and as we come to search for more of Him. It happens in confessing our sin one to another and repenting from it. It happens in forgiveness and humility. It happens in seeking God’s face at all times, not only in times of crisis. It happens in praising and worshipping Him. It happens in frequent fellowship with one another. It happens in opening our hearts and homes to the least of these. In short, it happens as we seek together to obey Jesus in all things (Matthew 28:20).

### **A NEW SEASON COMES**

Dear Elim Grace, the River of God runs down the channels and along the borders of our obedience to Jesus. We are to root ourselves by the River, so that we will in due season bear the fruit of the Spirit, who seeks to fill us and grow us up into the image of Christ. So, “If we live by the Spirit, let us also keep in step with the Spirit.” (Galatians 5:25) Jesus wants to be a fruitful vine in this place

called Oswego. For a moment there is pruning, but after arrives a new season of bearing fruit. So not our will, but His be done.

## 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. You are known. Your work is meaningful. Your work is evident in lives changed.

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

If you are a parent who volunteers, your whole family is invited to join you. Please RSVP ASAP at our Guest Services or at [elimgrace@gmail.com](mailto:elimgrace@gmail.com).

## WHAT ELSE IS HAPPENING AROUND ELIM GRACE?

- Our Saturday Night Service begins June 8th, 5pm. This will be a 3 month experiment. We are trying something new, a new way to reach and to serve more people. We hope to grow into our three services.
- Did you notice our new screen and projector? After 10 years we were in need of an upgrade.
- Our worship fundraiser for a new electric drum set was a success! Be on the lookout for that kit soon!
- We are hoping to purchase signs for our front row of parking that read, “Reserved for our guests”. This will be a visible cue to us that we want to build a culture of hospitality and look forward to guests. If they’re always empty, new people may not be coming. If they’re always full, then we should be excited!
- We are considering live streaming our services. If you are unable to make any of our three services, this would provide you with the opportunity to still connect. If people are not yet ready to walk in to our church, they could first get familiar with us this way.
- Speaking of live streaming, we are praying and in a conversation about live streaming our Sunday services into the County Jail. This would be a GREAT opportunity to spread the good news of Jesus.
- We are slowly beginning to turn our website into a place where people can go to find content, not just information. “Content that helps” is the goal. People are looking for help, but don’t always know where to find it. Our goal is be a place online they know they can go to for help with many things: understanding God, how to pray, better parenting, encouragement for teens and men and women, stewarding finances, marriage advice, enduring difficulty, foster care and adoption, etc. The content we will produce will include short videos and blog posts.
- The Desens House is moving slowly but steadily forward. We are nearly ready to file/incorporate as a not-for-profit. The current goal is to serve 4 women with ideas of expanding to 8. These four

women will be coming out of addiction, 30 days clean, and willing to do life together. The Desens House will be different in that it will not be a place from which the women living there can or will do their own thing. But our mission is to see them live, work, and serve together. We have also made a connection with the County Jail and a group of women inside coming out on probation. God has some surprises for us in store yet.

- My biggest prayer for The Desens House is for someone with a passion, a skill set, and a vision to lead it. While I aim to be involved, my first responsibility is to lead and pastor Elim Grace.
- We are hoping soon to welcome to the Deaconate a larger number of candidates than expected!
- We are beginning the process of identifying and establishing leadership values: what are the values we want our leaders to possess and that we want our culture to radiate.

## REAL LIFE THOUGHTS ON FOSTER CARE/ADOPTION

Our family has been lovingly dubbed The 7Evans by a friend. Our seventh member is, as many of you know, our daughter Emagine. After having her in foster care for 928 days, we were finally able to adopt her as our own last December. Still, foster care remains a large part of our heart. My wife, Alissa, often posts thoughts on foster care. While foster care isn't for everyone, too many, including us at one point, think too quickly "it's not for me". You are never ready. It is never easy. It is never comfortable. Here are some of Alissa's thoughts. Maybe God has a little boy or girl in mind for you and your family...

*"Today was a rough day for several of the #7Evans, so at dinner we all took turns talking about our favorite parts of the day. It wasn't long before serious faces were replaced by smiles and positive conversation. It was my turn to go and I looked up from my plate to see Emagine using BOTH hands and cutting her OWN food!!!! Small victory? NO WAY this is a huge victory for her."*

*"Vulnerable moment. Man is it easy to get 'too attached,' here I am laying in bed feeling too attached to the two little guys here for respite. How can I let them go, what will happen to them if they are in a failed placement, where will they go??? So many questions. I'm here too attached to the little one that I found out about last week, and am here expecting that every time my phone rings it's 'the call' telling me this little one is on the way to me. I haven't even meet this one and my heart is ready. I'm never worried what will happen to me if I get too attached, I DO worry about what happens to these precious little ones that don't ever have someone in their life to attach to."*

*"An important part of preventing child abuse and neglect is having strong support around vulnerable families. When that support isn't enough and a family needs to be divided for a time, a huge part of their success is safe, secure and stable families for the vulnerable children. When reunification isn't possible, a crucial part of those children moving forward in life is strong, healthy adoptive families. We ALL have a role to play in preventing child abuse and neglect. We can all be part of the solution."*

*"Tucking Emme in tonight, I wrapped her hair in a scarf (doing our best to keep it healthy and looking neat) she proudly exclaimed, "hey, I look like an African!" For me as a white mother to a black child this was huge. My hope for her is that she is proud of who she is, how God made her and of who she's become as she's overcome adversity."*

*"Just had to say no to 2 kids who need a place to stay, we need more foster homes."*

*“Sometimes foster care ends in adoption, sometimes it ends with the kiddos going home. It's not easy to say goodbye at all, BUT that's the goal. For families to be brought back together.”*

*“One day this adorable little blonde boy with a face full of freckles and a frown stood at my front door too nervous to come in. Thankfully, I knew that most 7 year old boys love legos, so with some strategically placed LEGO bins I left the room with the invitation “come in when you feel ready.” Didn't take him long. This little guy didn't know who I was. He didn't know if I was nice or mean, if I would hurt him or keep him safe, if I would feed him or shut him in a room alone...he took a risk when he walked into our home. While becoming foster parents is a scary step, and we often fear the unknown, becoming a foster child is definitely scarier and fear is something you are all too familiar with.”*

Have a conversation with us about foster care. We'd be happy to come alongside you. You are not alone. Rarely when Jesus has asked me to obey and do something new and big has it seemed like the right time in my eyes. But in His eyes things look different. We trust what He sees when He says, “follow me”.