
VISION FORWARD



THE WORK OF PRAYER

If I leave my office and the work I do there to go spend a day by the lake in prayer, am I wasting time? In my office I am reading and studying, writing sermons, managing budgets, making decisions, establishing communication, caring for people, meeting with leadership, developing plans, implementing systems, and the list goes on. But when I pray, I am doing none of that. So am I not working when I'm praying? Am I giving up the important for something trivial?

Jesus withdrew to pray often, spending a significant amount of time in prayer. This was time, then, that he was *not* spending on preaching, teaching, meeting, healing, serving,

leading, or doing anything else. Would we have considered that misplaced priorities? Mismanaged time? We might have, especially when there was so much "important" work still left to do. Plenty of sick people, towns to visit, authorities to challenge, disciples to train, and the list goes on. But Jesus didn't consider it a waste of time.

Prayer was the work important to or necessary to *all* his work.

Before he begins his ministry, he prays. Before he chooses his disciples, he prays. Before walking on water and calming the storm, he prays. Before his transfiguration, he prays.

Before raising Lazarus from the dead, He prays. Before he is betrayed to be crucified, he prays. Before he breathes his last on the cross, he prays. Before every crucial decision and critical time in his life and ministry, Jesus prays.

The God who created time, in the flesh of Jesus Christ, took time to pray.

Matthew tells us that one day Jesus “went out of the house and sat by the sea” (13:1). Did Jesus have the time to sit by the seaside? A crowd was gathering, looking for him to teach them. What Jesus did while he sat there we aren’t told. But maybe that time was a time of reflection, of preparation, of delight in His Father’s presence.

Prayer is coming back to center. Prayer is setting things straight. Prayer is rightly ordering the desires of our heart. Prayer is bringing our lives (back) under the guidance and provision of God.

So there by the “seaside” or by the lakeside, in a time and a place that we choose, we set ourselves apart and we surrender control. We surrender autonomy. We lay down the rush and the frustration we feel from trying to do things all the time in our own strength and in our own way. We remind ourselves that apart from Him we can do nothing on our own. Sitting by the seaside is how we will learn to pray in Gethsemane, “Not as I will, but as you will.”

This is the work of prayer: the daily work of centering our lives on God. This is the work important to *all* our work.

OUR AUGUST PRAYER TARGETS

I continue to hear God speak that He wants us to **“learn to pray”**. If we think we know how to already, we will miss some key lessons for the coming months and years. So our three prayer targets for August are:

- 1) **Pray for a spirit of prayer** — It’s one thing (and a good thing) to pray for our food or before bedtime. But a heart or an attitude of prayer is one that is in an ongoing conversation with God. How do you know if you’re developing a heart of prayer? Do you find yourself praying and talking with God not only at set or key times of the day but at random and spontaneous points throughout your day?

Throughout history, whenever God has visited his people, it has always been preceded by a movement or season of prayer. Is what we’re hearing and responding to these last few months indicative of something “in the works” by God? Maybe! But whether or not a revival is coming, we are called to be a people of prayer.

- 2) **Pray for a heart of generosity in time, talent, and treasure** — we have in the past been a very generous people and we want that to continue. But if we *assume* it will always be that way, we will find ourselves actually becoming less and less generous. We must be active in cultivating a heart and life of generosity both towards strangers and one another. In prayer this month let’s be deliberate and ask God to search our hearts and to give us opportunity to grow more generous in our time, talents, and treasure.
- 3) **Pray that we see and seek the harvest** — Jesus told his disciples the harvest was ready. Are we? Do we have a prophetic sense, picture, conviction of what awaits us? I believe the harvest we’ll see will be unchurched and broken people. We must prepare now by continuing to walk in faithfulness and obedience and, most of all, by seeking the *Master’s* heart for them.

As we have suggested before, if praying is new or hard for you, try this: take out your phone, set a 5 minute timer, and pray until the timer goes off. You won’t have to worry about the time and you might discover that those 5 minutes spent everyday are soon not long enough.

A GENERATIONAL RIVER

Recently in a time of prayer I was praying for the different generations that make up Elim Grace. A picture of a giant river came to mind. Feeding that giant river were many smaller ones. I believe the large river was the river of the life and ministry of Elim Grace and the smaller ones were its different generations.

My question to God was, "How can we ensure the generations continue to feed the river?"

"The voices of each must be present and heard."

So in September I will be setting time aside to sit and to listen to the different generations that make up Elim Grace. I will be seeking their take on things, their feedback, their ideas, etc.

The breakdown of groups will likely be: under 25, under 50, under 75, and over 75. More details to come.

(RE)DEFINING SMALL GROUPS

Our small groups are set to resume in September. We hope that if you've been a part of a small group that you will continue to be.

However, we're making a shift. We hope that everyone will "join a team". Again, this could be your current small group. But it could also be the Bible study you attend weekly. It could be the Elim Grace ministry you volunteer and serve in. It could be a new group you start alongside others in Elim Grace.

Here's the point: every disciple of Jesus should be individually in prayer and in the Word of God daily; every disciple should be coming together with the larger body on the weekend to worship and to the preaching/teaching of God's Word; and every disciple should be in some kind of ongoing personal fellowship with those other disciples. If these foundational things are a part of your daily/weekly walk and

life with Jesus, then you will grow as his disciple.

While we want to continue our current small groups, we recognize not everyone will be in one. But we want encourage us all to "join a team" and to be in some kind of weekly/frequent fellowship.

DEFINITION: (*WHAT*) A small group/team is a time and a place I commit to (*WHY*) for the process of my spiritual growth as a disciple (*HOW*) through significant relationships and the Word of God.

EXAMPLES: During the week small groups meet to discuss the previous Sunday's sermon. Our Bible studies tackle different books of the Bible. Our Elim Grace Worship Team may get together for a video on the topic of worship. Another group may meet at the lake for photography and a conversation on how faith impacts art. Still another group of business men and women may begin meeting together to discuss what it looks like to be a Christian in the work place, etc..

Plenty of options exist. Are there any requirements? Only (1) that it meet the definition above and (2) that the group's details and group's attendance be submitted to the office (Pastor Jonathan/Bill, Esther, or Joe).

OUR NEXT FACEBOOK LIVE EVENT

Having received feedback from many of you, we will continue our Facebook Live events. At the end of our next event, I will again devote a few minutes to answering questions.

If you have a question you'd like to see answered, please send it to Joe Grasso at friendlyneighborhoodapprentice@gmail.com

ELIM GRACE PAY NOTHING (A NEW FACEBOOK GROUP)

(By Joe Grasso)

Do you have too much awesome stuff? Do you want to bless someone with your awesome stuff? Yeah you do! Pay Nothing is all about meeting needs and meeting them for zero cost. You will PAY NOTHING!

If you have a need, you can post it here. If you have extra awesome stuff, post it here and let people with needs find it!

LEARNING TO REST

(By Rachael Stahl)

I recently had a conversation with a friend in which we were discussing summer plans. She shared that her children were asking for a break—a season of rest—from their extracurricular activities. She was not sure if it was a good idea. She is afraid that if they take this time off, it will set them back in the long run. She may be right to an extent.

Our culture is fast paced and competitive – you snooze, you lose, right? Our culture believes that rest equals failure, a setback, laziness, or retirement. How did we get to a point where we even wonder if rest is a good idea? I, myself, have felt guilty for resting at times.

The reality, though, is that God tells us we need rest. He commands us to set time aside to rest. He calls us to Himself, because He wants to give us the gift of rest. He has built rest into the story of creation and the story of our lives.

Why don't we want to rest?

If our identity is rooted in what we do, being restless seems like a great thing. Our world chants “greater, bigger, and higher” as the anthem for success. This often comes at great cost. If we stop to rest, we may miss something, be surpassed, overlooked, or looked down upon. Rest often seems as the only thing we can afford to give up.

However, a foundation built on works and the praise of man will never satisfy the longings of our heart. It will keep us in a continual race to be the best or to get more, leaving us

perpetually restless and unsatisfied. Who can sustain that life and feel free?

Additionally, when we rest it requires us to quiet our surroundings and become vulnerable. Rest is an experience in being known by God and knowing Him. As we vulnerably sit still and still

ourselves, God's kindness highlights areas of our heart and life that need attention. This can be scary, hard, and painful. So busyness is often used as a tactic to avoid slowing down and addressing the areas that God is revealing. God is relentless, though, and He's after your heart. He will keep bringing those things to the surface.

The Invitation

In Matthew 11, Jesus gives us an invitation. He says, “Come to Me all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest.” The only thing we need to do is come, to answer His call. As we set aside our ambitions and still ourselves, He greets us with the gift of rest.

Oswald Chambers writes this regarding Matthew 11:28:

“...and I will give you rest”— that is, “I will sustain you, causing you to stand firm.” He is not saying, “I will put you to bed, hold your hand, and sing you to sleep.” But, in essence, He is saying, “I will get you out of bed— out of your listlessness and exhaustion, and out of your condition of being half dead while you are still alive. I will penetrate you with the spirit of life, and you will be sustained by the perfection of vital activity.”

Being purposeful about taking time to rest is being wise about setting healthy boundaries, so that you can follow the path God has for you. Responding to Jesus' invitation is not time wasted or opportunity lost. Rather, it is life given. In our time of rest, Jesus infuses us with strength, clarity, and perfect peace, so that we can go on and do the work He has set before us.

***"PRAYER IS THE WORK IMPORTANT
TO ALL OF OUR WORK"***