

VISION FORWARD



QUARANTINE THOUGHTS

Some time ago I began recording short "devotional" videos for Elim Grace born out of this season of life we're in. These videos are available on our Instagram and Facebook pages, Youtube channel, and website.

However, as this time of quarantine and social distancing has begun to draw to a close, I began to reflect back on the sequence of those thoughts and videos. And so I have put them into print. One, that you might have a written record from this time and, two, that it might encourage you, since even I have forgotten some of what I said!

March 11 -

"There's a lot of talk today about the Coronavirus, sickness, and infection. Elim Grace, let's not be controlled by fear. Let's not be driven by panic."

Live by faith in God. Live by wisdom and commonsense. Live by love. Live by prayer.

March 12 -

"The Coronavirus is impacting us all. While we should not live in fear, we should also not mock those who are living in fear. This is an opportunity to love your neighbor as yourself. So, are you stocked up on supplies? Maybe someone you know isn't."

Mocking is easy often because of our “take” on things. Still, we must refrain from this and consider how we can pray and care for and love our neighbor. Simply because we’re not being impacted shouldn’t mean we turn from or look down on those who are being impacted.

March 16 -

“the building is closed but the church is open”

This is not a “me” first time, but a “you” first time. We are part of the community of Oswego. In the coming days, weeks, or months, honor and show value to other people. A crisis can bring out the best and the worst in us, but it can also bring out the best of Christ in us.

March 28 -

“Am I creating a new unsustainable pace?”

When life is put on hold and “paused,” we felt relief. We were no longer on an unsustainable pace, wearing ourselves out. We tend to fill empty space, whether in our house, our calendar or our heart. We can fill our lives with many good things, but inadvertently create for ourselves a new unsustainable pace of life. And so we’re not slowing down. We’re going as fast as ever, we’re just doing different things.

March 30 -

“In every ending is hidden the seed of a new beginning”

Many things as we’ve known them are ending. In the Scriptures there are two words used for “end”: Finis and Telos. Finis means “finished,” while Telos means “purpose” or “beyond”. A lot of things are ending, there’s a Finis or a Telos to them. But let’s not forget the second word in the big picture of things, in the ways that God work. There are purposes beyond what we can see occurring.

In every Finis is hidden a Telos. In every ending is hidden a seed of a new beginning. Because a seed is so small, you may not be able to see

that seed of a new beginning or what it might look like. God’s seeds are planted in your life by grace. So don’t just go along with the change, GROW with the change. Ask God to grow in you what’s He doing by His grace.

April 1 -

When this all ends, don’t let what God’s begun in you end with it

What will we have to show at the end of this? Everybody’s going to show something. Will your marriage and family be stronger than it was before? Will our community and church be stronger than it was before? We’ve been given the gift of time (thought it may not seem like a gift). So use this time to reflect, reassess, reevaluate, reinvest,...to repent.

Sometimes we’re so busy that when God shows us things in our lives He wants to change, we say, “Yeah, yeah, God. I’ll get to it soon.” We’ve been given the gift of time.

April 3 -

You’re going to touch your face? There are things frustrating us. We’re on the verge of angry. What do we need? Patience.

Patience is a capacity to endure. Patience is a fruit of the Spirit, a character trait of God. God is so patient with us. Why? Because He has a plan and a hope for our future. Without patience we wouldn’t experience forgiveness, unity, reconciliation, new beginnings. Without patience we don’t have a future, but with patience we do.

April 4 -

The first headline on every major news outlet should be hope, not death

Hope wants facts. Hope is not blind optimism. But hope wants ALL the facts. Because of Easter, the resurrection of Jesus, the major headline across the globe reads hope, not death. Proverbs 23:13 reminds us that hope in God will not be cut off, not even by death.

Every single day make the decision to take actions of hope and faith. Set your mind on things that are above, not on things that are on earth (Colossians 3:2).

April 6 -

30 days? 40 years? God will provide

Throughout forty years in the wilderness, not once did Israel's clothing or shoes wear out. Not once. God was their provision and protection every day for forty years. A million people and forty years was no challenge to God.

What we're going through, as long as it's going to take, is no challenge for God's provision nor protection of us. Nothing you need will "wear out". He will neither let your feet swell nor slip. He will lead you through. Every desert leads us to another portion of God's promises to us in Christ.

But the biggest thing God wanted to teach Israel in the desert was that though He was going to provide for them all of the essentials, more essential than the essentials was God's Word. Man does not live by bread alone but by the word of God. If God is going to provide everything we need as humanity, how much more will He provide everything we need as His people.

April 9 -

A wilderness or a garden? Our choice

Psalms 139:4 says "See if there is any wicked way in me and lead me in the way everlasting." The negative is there are grievous and wicked ways in me hidden from my sight that I need God to point out or else they will lead me astray. The positive is that God longs to lead me in his abundant and good ways.

We need daily God to lead us. We need daily the structure and authority of God's leadership over our lives. The words "lead me" in Psalm 139 are used often in the Old Testament. But

they're not used at all in the New. Do you know what two words are used? "Follow me." The "everlasting way" is replaced with Jesus.

"Jesus lead me" becomes our prayer. This request is not difficult to make. At least not in the beginning. We ask Him to lead us in our marriage, family, finances, health, work, rest, etc. The difficulty comes when Jesus comes and says to us, "Ok, follow me in..." But do you know what? A garden left to itself becomes an uncultivated wilderness and wasteland. But a garden in the hands of a loving, wise, faithful, and tender Gardner is going to be grown into a beautiful garden.

April 13 -

The MOST important prayer to your day?

Easter morning I prayed, Lord, give me grace for this...give me grace for this...give me grace for this...give me grace today, not just because it's Easter, but because it's Easter everyday!" Grace can triumph every single day!

One of the most remarkable things about Paul's letters is that he begins every single one with some form of "Grace to you" and he ends every single one with some form of "Grace be with you". God's grace comes to you and then it goes with you. So we pray, "Lord, give me your grace," but also, "Lord, I receive your grace." He is ready to give us grace. We have only to ask and to receive.

April 16 -

A crisis reveals two things

A crisis does create new problems. But for the most part a crisis reveals old problems lying under the surface, problems much bigger than we wanted to admit (say in our marriage or finances). But a crisis also reveals living memorials of God's grace.

When Joshua and the Israelites cross the Jordan River God calls on them to build a memorial of stone. But it's not simply an

inanimate pile of stones. It's a symbolic and living memorial that speaks to Israel of God's faithfulness and promises towards them. In this sense, the memorial is a "living" event.

What memorials of God's grace are hidden in your life that you should remember? For example, maybe it's a song, a song that God used at one point in your life, and it still "speaks" to you of God's faithfulness and grace towards you. Maybe it's a photograph that speaks to an experience you had of God's presence somewhere and it reminds you of His continued presence with you.

Maybe it's a model, like my son Joshua has finished during quarantine. Perhaps decades from now he will show it to his children and it will "speak" to him of this time and God's faithfulness to him through it all. What is a living memorial of God's grace in your life?

April 24 -

If we want to finish well, here's what we need

We hear we're almost to the end of quarantine and I want to finish well. I want you to finish well. I want us to finish well. There are things that God has been doing in us and, yes, He wants to finish what He's begun. And so in order to reach the end and finish well, Paul says, "Every athlete exercises self-control in all things." (1 Corinthians 9:25) Every athlete. At least the athletes who want to win the prize. They know that the cost to themselves personally is to exercise self-control, not in some things, but in all things.

We are born into this world learning to take control of ourselves. Learning to take control of other things. But we are born again learning to give up control of ourselves, learning to give up control of things, to Christ. Which is why Paul also writes in Galatians 5 that one of the fruit of the Spirit is self-control. This means "it is no longer I who live" exercising self-control, as it were, but "Christ who lives in me" exercising self-control (Gal. 2:20).

And so we have the power, it is absolutely possible, to finish well this season of our lives. To exercise self-control in all things pertaining to our life in Christ.

May 1 -

We have a moral responsibility to speak truth, but also to listen to truth.

We have a moral responsibility, then, to not listen to what is false and this includes what is hateful, vindictive, distorted.

Today both the Left and the Right speak some measure of truth and both speak some measure of falsehood. What we listen to shapes how we will speak. Truth is shaped by truth and falsehood is shaped by falsehood.

"Pay attention to what you hear," (Mark 4:24). Truth or falsehood will be measured out to you.

How do I know if I'm listening to truth and that truth is shaping my interior self? Am I hateful, spiteful, critical, suspicious, elitist, arrogant, superior, find enjoyment in tearing others down, in proving others wrong? Or am I kind, forgiving, patient, slow to speak, humble, glad and quick to encourage and build others up? A tree is known by its fruit. We reap what we sow.

These short videos will continue, as an effort on my part to follow Jesus as your Pastor and to love you as His sheep.

MAY PRAYER TARGETS

Grab your phone, set a 2 minute timer, and pray daily:

- 1) That God would continue to provide for and to protect Elim Grace, even as He did Israel in the desert for forty years.
- 2) As we move forward as a church and a city, for a spirit of wisdom and humility to learn from the past and to build for the future.
- 3) For a quick return to "business as usual" for our local businesses/economy