

VISION FORWARD



UNITY: THE HEALTH OF GOD

As a fitness goal, many people want great abs. But great abs are the result of a focus beyond the abs themselves. Great abs are the result of a focus on a strong core. In fact, the abs are only a small part of your core and core function.

Your core is a complex series of muscles that includes everything, other than your arms and legs. Your core is a factor in every movement of the human body. We could say that everything you do is connected to or in unity with the core.

As a goal in life, many people want a great life, or a great company, or a great ministry, or a great marriage, or a great friendship. But all these great things are the result of a focus beyond the things themselves. A great life is the result of a focus

beyond the pursuit of a great life. A great life is the result of a focus on a strong core: on unity.

The Psalmist sings, "How good and pleasant it is when brothers (and sisters, a person, a people) dwell in unity." (Psalm 133:1) The unity he has in mind and holds in his heart is unity, a dwelling together, with God and with others.

We could say, then, that unity is a factor in every movement of your life.

We could also say that, as disciples and as the church of Jesus, unity is a factor in every movement of the body of Christ.

The health of an organization, the health of any organism, is in its unity, in its being united and working together. This is a direct reflection of the

image of God. We are imaging the image we are created in when we “dwell together” in unity.

The health of the Godhead is in the unity of the Godhead: the union of the Father, Spirit, and Son. “I do only what I see the Father doing. I speak only what I hear the Father saying,” Jesus said. How does Jesus see and hear the Father? In and by the presence and power of the Holy Spirit.

There is unity in the Godhead. There is no competing for who’s right, no conflict, no politics, no bureaucracy, no hostility, no division, no mockery. Only unity. Being of one mind and heart and will. “How good and pleasant” it must be to dwell within the “happy land of the Trinity”!

The health of our church is in our unity with God and with one another. As the saying goes, “You can catch sickness but you can’t catch health.” Health is intentionally pursued.

Health is found in our abiding in The Vine. The fruit of the Spirit—“love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control (Galatians 5:22-23)—is the result of abiding in unity with God and with one another. In fact, there’s no other way for the fruit of the Spirit to grow in us, to be identified, cultivated and pruned, then to “dwell together” in relationship. To dwell apart or, worse, to drive apart and bring disunity, is to become disconnected from The Vine and as a result to become an uncultivated and unpruned wilderness.

If we want to be a healthy church (and healthy disciples), we must intentionally pursue a strong, healthy core. We must intentionally pursue together unity.

If I want my mind, my heart, my body, my marriage, my company, my friendship, my finances, my parenting—anything and everything in my life—to be healthy and flourish, then I must focus beyond those things on my “core”. I must remember that unity is a factor in every movement of my life. The health of God is in His unity. The health God gives us is in our unity: our unity with Him and with others.

Dear Elim Grace, I wrote the above words in January, without any knowledge of COVID or riots or the incredible amount of hatred, anger, and division that has surfaced as a result. We couldn’t see over the horizon of 2020. But God could and He still called us to be “a united church, uniting people”.

The health of the nation is bad. As American citizens we are sick. But let us remember to which kingdom we belong. To Whom we belong.

We do not belong first to any country nor to any political party. We are citizens first of the kingdom of heaven, not of the United States. We are disciples of Jesus first, not Americans. We serve the King first, created and saved to reflect His image and to fill the earth with His glory. “Not to us, O Lord, not to us, but to your name give glory, for the sake of your steadfast love and your faithfulness!” (Psalm 115:1)

Our calling, then, is to Jesus above all. To do His will. He has saved and purchased us with His own blood. We are His servants, we are His church, we are His ambassadors. We model the culture of His kingdom and His attributes in all circumstances and towards all people. There is nothing more nor less that we must do.

But to do so and to be so, more than ever, we must remember it is no longer we who live but Christ who lives in us (Galatians 2:20). We are new creations, the dwelling place of God by His Spirit. His word is written onto our heart, The Word is written into our hearts.

Let us not grow weary, then, Elim Grace. Let us continue to do the good works we are called and equipped to do! In these difficult days let us continue to press on to know Jesus and to make Him known! Let us continue to fight for unity and to fight against division! Let us continue to be a people after God’s own heart! “But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.” (1 Peter 2:9)

WE ARE ALL RESPONSIBLE

One sign read, “I’m 66 and I can’t believe I still have to protest this!”

Ahmaud Arbery. George Floyd. And countless human beings before them. Murdered. And we say again and again, “I can’t believe this still happens!” “This has to stop!” “I can’t believe I still have to protest this!”

The reality is that we will likely continue to say things like this.

So is there anything we can do? Is there anything we should do?

“Everyone who hates his brother is a murderer,” writes the Apostle John (1 John 3:15). This is where I choose to start. I am “everyone who hates”. I am “a murderer”.

“How can you say to your brother, ‘Let me take the speck out of your eye,’ when there is the log in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your brother’s eye.” (Matthew 7:4-5)

The problem is not first out there, but first in here - in *me*.

Deep within the human heart, deep within OUR own heart, there exists a sense of superiority. We hold ourselves to be, in some way over someone, superior. I do not mean that we know we are better at something than someone, or that they are better at something than we are. That is to be expected and can be acknowledged when necessary.

I mean by “superior” that we believe we are of more inherent or intrinsic WORTH than someone else. In other words, they are less valuable, less worthy, in many respects, less human. And in our pride we look down on them.

This “pride” is a problem for and in all of us. And where not confessed and repented of, it will lead to hate and division. And it’s a problem that’s not going away as long as the human heart stays the same and as long as we feed our cultural attitude with our OWN kind of hatred and indifference.

Hatred is hatred. Whether against another race or religion or gender or class or political party. And hate feeds hate. We want things to change? They won’t and they can’t as long as I hate. I may not hate the same things or people you do, BUT I STILL HATE. And so do you.

“To hate” can mean a strong dislike, aversion towards, hostility towards, to detest.

In many ways we are all responsible for the death of Ahmaud and George. Not because we’re not

outraged or standing up or lending our voice to the outcry. We are, as we should be. But we’re all responsible because we all feed a culture of hatred and animosity and arrogance with our own. We justify our own hearts but condemn the hearts of others. “God, I thank you that I am not like other men” (Luke 18:11)”

My conviction is this: **until we are all responsible, no one is responsible. For racism. For unity. For change.**

The fundamental problem is not human skin but human heart. And the fundamental problem of the human heart is sin: pride and holding ourselves superior over God.

So, it would follow that, if the fundamental problem is the human heart, the fundamental solution is also the human heart. Or the forgiving and repenting of our sin towards God and towards others. In the end, and to begin, we’re talking about a *recreating* of the human heart.

Jesus said, “Are you also still without understanding? Do you not see that whatever goes into the mouth passes into the stomach and is expelled? But what comes out of the mouth proceeds from the heart, and this defiles a person. For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false witness, slander. These are what defile a person.” (Matthew 15:15-20) We need a new heart.

“Why have I found favor in your eyes, that you should take notice of me, since I am a foreigner?” (Ruth 2:10) Or put another way, “I am a stranger; why have you treated me like a friend?” Here, Boaz, the kinsman redeemer, pursues Ruth with kindness despite the fact that she’s an outsider to the community. The heart of Boaz is the heart of Jesus. Jesus was often accused and called a “friend to sinners”.

Matthew records a parable (Matthew 25) in which Jesus teaches and identifies God as the God who identifies with the strangers, the hated, the despised, the rejected, the distant, the “worthless” and less than human — the very people I perceive to be my enemy today.

We have to read Jesus words as being first about US. About ME.

I AM THE ENEMY. But Jesus showed me kindness. I was a stranger, but He treated me like a friend and welcomed me in. His kindness and goodness towards me were not in vain! He chased me down, not to condemn me, but to save me and to lead me to repentance and to life. This is where change in the human heart begins: with tasting and seeing of the goodness of God in Jesus Christ.

Jesus became the enemy. He took our hatred. He was murdered on a cross for our sin. Why? That in His flesh He might break down every barrier that separates us both from God and from one another. Jesus came to KILL the hostility in our hearts in His flesh. And the power of the cross *today* is that it can heal hearts, and through healed hearts, it can heal society.

We begin to bring change by asking God to bring change to our heart. "Create in me a clean heart, O God" (Psalm 51:10). Let's confess and repent of the hostility that is in us first. Let's receive the kindness and forgiveness of God in Christ towards us, so that hatred can begin to lose its grip on our hearts and lives. Then we can go in obedience to Jesus and begin to "love one another as I have loved you." (John 15:12)

ELIM GRACE YOUTH: "Your Jesus stance" (By Jodi Smith)

"But if anyone has the world's goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God's love abide in him? Little children, let us not love in word or talk but in deed and in truth."
1 John 3:17-18

This is not an easy topic to cover in an Instagram post, in fact, it's near impossible. I'm treading lightly on every word for fear of not doing it justice. But I've learned it's better to try to speak up with unpolished words than to never speak up at all!

All of us would agree "racism is wrong" but just "not being racist" is not enough. In a world where hatred, prejudices, and dissension is running rampant, We must ALWAYS fight for unity. But unity requires seeing one another through the eyes of Christ!

This might sound like a daunting task. BUT how amazing is it that the word God gave to Elim Grace for 2020 was UNITY. Isn't that just a beautiful picture of God's provision and faithfulness? He was

preparing us for "such a time as this" long before now! Which means He is in it with us! When the world seems anything but unified, that is what we must fight for!

We cannot lose sight that the world is watching to see how those trying to represent JESUS will respond.

Many of you many not care about politics, but some of you might. I'd challenge you to seek out justice, and ask yourself the old saying "what would Jesus do?" I believe with all my heart Jesus would stand in front of the oppressed before he ever defended a political party.

Do not let your political stance cloud your "Jesus stance." Our call is to unity! Our call is to love one another. And Christians, we have to show the radical love of Christ NOW MORE THAN EVER.

Elim Grace Youth: We are called to not just love in word or talk, but in deed and truth....in action.

JUNE PRAYER TARGETS

Take out your phone, set a 2-3 timer, and pray daily for:

- 1) Unity — that we would pray, listen, learn, and act to be a united church, uniting people, especially as it pertains to racism in our community, county, and state. What can we do? What SHOULD we do?
- 2) The Desens House — we have been approved by the city! We can now begin to move with speed. Continue to pray for resources, money, partnerships for employment, and favor. It is still our prayer to open The Desens House this year.
- 3) Elim Grace Youth — for Leighton and Jodi Smith as the relaunch our youth ministry! Pray for them, the youth, and for a growing and healthy ministry to develop.