

VISION FORWARD



RESURRECTION AND INTERCESSION

Jesus is the executor of God's will. He fulfills the covenant promise of God of an inheritance for His people. All God's promises are yes and amen in Him. Therefore, Jesus Christ is worthy to be praised because He alone is worthy to "open the scroll" of God's purpose and will for human history. He alone can rule over it all from beginning to end with divine power and authority. Because of His death, resurrection, ascension, and exaltation to the right hand of God, He alone has received "all authority in heaven and on earth". Nothing is outside the bounds of His dominion. Nothing that stands against His kingdom will prevail in the end.

Elim Grace, this has great implications for our prayers. We pray to Him who rules not only over time and human history, but also from within it. In particular, He stands and walks in the midst of His people, the church. He cares for and tends to them as the old testament priests tended to the lamps in the temple. His aim is to ensure that our witness to Him will in all the earth shine bright and remain lit. And one way the brightness radiates is through our prayers that rise to Him.

Prayer is a way of entrusting ourselves to God, not partially, but entirely. Prayer is asking God to come and to do not our will but His "on earth as in heaven". Everywhere and in everything as He knows best.

Our lives in their entirety we owe to God as His creation. Every breath and every day is a gift from Him. But our lives in their entirety we also owe to God as His new creation. He has saved us from our sins and caused us to be "born again" through faith in Jesus. As a result we have been given a new heart and center for a new life. Now it is no longer we who live, but Christ who lives in us. Now every day we are being conformed into the image of the perfect image of God as revealed to us in His Son Jesus. Now we are fully alive, no longer living for ourselves, but for Him who loved us and gave Himself for us.

But now we are also confronted daily with troubles, temptations, and trials. We endure setbacks and breakdowns. We experience pain and disappointment. We know suffering and darkness. Yet through it all we entrust ourselves to Jesus and to His promises. We surrender to

His will and to His ways. We love and obey His Word. We worship and cling to Him. *All* of this is prayer. More than words, prayer is action. It is entering into the life and presence of God with our whole mind, heart, body — all that is within me bless His holy name.

We can pray, entrusting our whole selves and lives to God, then, because we see Jesus high and lifted up through it all. Because we see Him, the Lamb of God that was slain for all time. Because we see Him who has conquered sin and death once and for all. Because we see Him who is the Living One and alive forevermore.

So we pray, Elim Grace, because Jesus *is* alive. We intercede because Jesus reigns. The full harvest of God's kingdom is rooted eternal in the sovereignty of Jesus Christ. The full assurance of God's will is founded on the unshakeable rock of Christ's name. Before Him every knee will bow and every tongue will confess that He is Lord of all.

We don't pray, then, Elim Grace, because it might help us or because it might get us something. We pray because it is our living confession that Jesus holds the keys of life and death. That He accomplishes the will of God for our lives. That He has the authority to bring human history to its conclusion. That He's received the power to establish the new heaven and the new earth.

We pray, Elim Grace, because we believe that one day we will see and stand in awe before God at how in His great wisdom, power, and love He used our lives to do His good and perfect will throughout time and human history. Yes, we pray because all this God has committed to do through the name of Jesus Christ, our Lord and our Savior.

So, Elim Grace, let's pray. And let's intercede. To intercede is the ability and willingness to carry a large burden over a long period of time. Not all have the gift of intercession. But some do. Some of YOU do. It's my desire to see us step into the ministry of intercession. To that end, we will be starting an Elim Grace Intercessory group led by Elders Mike Dahar and Bob Kester. Not all will be called by the Spirit to this, but to those of you who are (or think you may be), hear what the Spirit is saying. Some things God seeks to do only through intercession. So let us be found ready and faithful to carry the burdens Jesus calls us to carry in intercession. And doing so, let His will be done.

BOOKS CURRENTLY CHALLENGING ME

A MEMOIR: THE PASTOR by Eugene Peterson

As you know, every year I select a “mentor” under which I'll sit and learn by reading most or all of their writings. Taking time like this means I'm doing more than reading an author's book. It means I'm “reading” an author's mind and heart. I absorb not only *what* they think, but *how* they think.

This year that mentor is Eugene Peterson and, before moving on to the books he's specifically written for pastors, I'm re-reading his memoir:

“In The Pastor, author Eugene Peterson, tells the story of how he started Christ Our King Presbyterian Church in Bel Air, Maryland and his gradual discovery of what it really means to be a pastor. Steering away from abstractions, Peterson challenges conventional wisdom regarding church marketing, mega pastors, and the church's too-cozy relationship to American glitz and consumerism to present a simple, faith-based description of what being a minister means today. In the end, Peterson discovers that being a pastor boils down to ‘paying attention and calling attention to ‘what is going on now’ between men and women, with each other and with God.”

WE BECOME WHAT WE WORSHIP: A Biblical Theology of Worship by G.K. Beale

“The heart of the biblical understanding of idolatry, argues Gregory Beale, is that we take on the characteristics of what we worship. Employing Isaiah 6 as his interpretive lens, Beale demonstrates that this understanding of idolatry permeates the whole canon, from Genesis to Revelation. Beale concludes with an application of the biblical notion of idolatry to the challenges of contemporary life.”

Beale is one of my favorite theologians and this is a topic of great interest to me. Other books on the subject of idolatry that I've found very helpful are “Counterfeit Gods” by Timothy Keller; “Identity and Idolatry” by Richard Lints, “Soul Idolatry” by David Clarkson, and “The Expulsive Power of a New Affection” by Thomas Chalmers.

WHY DO YOU PRAY? WHY SHOULD YOU PRAY? (By Elder Phil Ryan)

Many people view prayer as an emergency only option. This is true in the church, sorry to say, as well as outside the church. Yet scripture tells us to pray without stopping. “Pray continually; give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus.” (1 Thessalonians 5:17-18) So why isn’t prayer our default setting instead of our emergency setting? I believe that we may have lost some very important concepts about prayer, which has resulted in us seeing prayer as unimportant or less important than it is. But it is clear from Scripture that our Heavenly Father desires for each of us to see prayer as essential to who we are and what we do as the people of God.

1) We fail to understand the power of prayer ALL the time (not just for emergency healings and in dire situations). God’s power, just like His other attributes, didn’t and doesn’t change. So why should we reserve it for emergencies only? If we truly believe in the power of prayer as described in the Bible, we would not see it as a duty nor as a support operation. We would see it for what it truly is: a conversation with our Father about the situations and problems and desires in our lives and our church and our community. Paul reminds us, “Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.” (Philippians 4:6-7) So, there it is, we worry instead of praying. We fail to ask in prayer and even to petition (a formal or legal request supported by others) our God for His divine help. We don’t thank Him for answering our prayers and petitions before or after He responds. We wonder why we have no peace but lots of worry; no understanding but lots of fruitless efforts; no covering of peace but lots of feeling alone in our situations. Prayer is the answer! For in prayer God’s peace will guard our hearts and our minds in Christ Jesus.

2) Psalm 34:15-18 says, “The eyes of the Lord are on the righteous and His ears are attentive to their cry; the face of the Lord is against those who do evil, to cut off the memory of them from the earth. The righteous cry out, and the Lord hears them; He delivers them from all their troubles. The Lord is close to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit.” Our problem often is that we don’t see ourselves as righteous. Yet, Romans tells us that we are covered in Jesus’ righteousness as believers. So, if God has called me righteous because of the work of Jesus on the cross, then I am righteous in His sight. It is just not my righteousness but His, so that none may boast. Therefore, I am allowed to cry out to Him and He is faithful to deliver me from my troubles. There are no qualifiers on the amount or the depth or the type of our troubles. So set aside the thoughts of how you just sinned in some way and press in to Him in prayer and just start with asking Him to forgive your latest sin. Remember, He is attentive to your cry. I have been the crushed in spirit, so I know that He saves and walks closely with me. It’s not that I am a great guy, it’s that He is a great God! If you understand who you are in Him and you understand

who He is, then there are no real impediments to coming before Him in prayer. You are a son/daughter of the Most High.

3) We fail to realize that we in our day and age have the same prayer power as any other age and person. James 5:17-18 reminds us that “Elijah was a man just like us. He prayed earnestly that it would not rain, and it did not rain on the land for three and a half years. Again, he prayed, and the heavens gave rain and the earth produced its crops.” I know that I am not Elijah, but I also know that his God is my God and since God cannot change, therefore, I can pray just like Elijah did. Not against or for physical rain (unless that is what He calls me to do), but how about for the rain of the Holy Spirit in revival. How about for that person who needs a miracle healing. How about for that situation that has been annoying me for months or perhaps years. Yes, I can ask for His help and my God will answer my prayers. Sometimes He answers with changing the situation just as I wanted it to change. Sometimes He says wait, which does not mean to stop praying, but, the opposite, to continue in prayer. Sometimes He answers by changing my heart so that I realize that what I wanted was not really what I or the situation needed. Sometimes He answers with “My grace is enough for you to go through this situation” (Paul asked three times for a situation to be removed from him and God said that His grace would be enough for him in the situation). In each case, I am at peace with His answer, because I trust Him to give me what is best for me and for the situation. I am willing to receive His His word and promise that “My grace is enough for you in this situation,” and I am thankful to Him no matter how He chooses to answer, for I know that in His answers I will find peace and I will be covered by His unending love.

So, we see that our God does not change and therefore His power is the same yesterday, today, and forever. So how are we to pray? That is often a question that stops us from going forward. We are like the father of the son Jesus healed. When Jesus asked him to only believe that he could and would heal his son, he cried out, “I believe, help my unbelief.” Think of it this way. You are going to have a talk with your closest friend who cares about and for you. You already know that this person is not very likely to reject you no matter what you tell them. That’s our Heavenly Father and He *will not* reject you. After all, His Son died for your sins, so that you might have a new life in Him. Do you really think that He is going to be shocked at what you tell Him or what you ask of Him? Read the Psalms. They often describe David or others telling God they want some situation dealt with by God breaking the teeth in their enemy’s mouth. But in crying out to Him, it is God who changes their hearts so that they end up saying, “but, Lord, let it be Your will and not my will that is done here.” Maybe it is that you are unwilling to have God change your heart in this situation, so therefore you are unwilling to bring it to Him in prayer. I have one piece of advice on this matter: if the situation

is causing you pain and grief you might just as well talk to God about it, as He is the only one who can truly fix or heal it anyway.

Now let's talk about the how to pray. Many of us view ourselves as failures and not qualified to pray to a Holy God. Nothing could be, nor is, further from the truth, in fact it is a lie from the pit of hell. You are a child of God and as such you have access before the very throne of God. We have already said that prayer is a conversation with our loving Father, so you and I are free to come before Him with anything and everything. I hope that you believe that, because it is the truth! Sometimes we are at a loss for the words to pray. That's ok with God. You come before Him just the same and as you rest in Him, He will give you peace and then the words to ask Him for what you desire. The Bible also says that the Holy Spirit intercedes in our behalf when we don't know what or how to pray. Romans 8:26-27 says, "In the same way the Spirit also helps our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we should, but the Spirit Himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words; and He who searches the hearts knows what the mind of the Spirit is, because He intercedes for the saints according to the will of God." The Holy Spirit will tell the Father what our mind and heart and words cannot tell Him. That is comforting to me, that when I fail to know how or what to pray, my prayers are still getting through before the throne of God for His answers.

How should we pray for others and is it important? Let me start with this analogy. A spear or arrow is a weapon of war and used for hunting. The spear tip or arrow head is sharp and designed for cutting through skin and bone. It is pointed to punch through the skin and into the body. Leaders are spear tips or arrow heads. It is their task to do the cutting through. The term "on the cutting edge" applies to leaders doing their job of being the first to spot the newest trend or finding the solution to a big problem. In the church they are those who see what the Lord wants the church to do next or where to apply teaching to support the Lord's vision for the church to move forward into what God is calling the church to do. They are those who see God's vision and they are the vision providers to the church or to the group that they lead. Did you know that it is the spear shaft and the throw that are the force that drive the spear tip or arrow head through to do what it is intended to do? The Holy Spirit is the throwing force and directional guidance, if I can put it that way, and it is prayer that is the shaft. If the Holy Spirit only throws the spear tip or the arrow head, it will have some effect but not nearly the effect of the tip with its shaft. So, leaders need those behind them in prayer that help them to be more successful in their leadership. Nehemiah 4:9 says "We prayed to our God and posted a guard day and night to meet this threat." The completion of the wall rebuild was being threatened by outside forces, so Nehemiah took two actions. First was to pray for God's protection and help, but he didn't stop there. He took a second action to set a guard both day and night to be ready against attack. The big take away here is that prayer is taking action. We often downplay the importance of prayer in favor of doing something. The Bible says that is backwards. Prayer should be our first action.

Are you apart of the spear shaft for our pastors and leaders? If not, why not? Maybe no one has invited you to be a part of the prayer network of our church. Well, you can be and I invite you to become one. Maybe you figure you don't have the time to pray for all of our pastors and leaders. That's just fine. I encourage you to pick one or two and start praying for them. Maybe it starts out as once a week for five minutes. That's a good starting point. And if you are one with small children, finding five minutes outside of the bathroom is like finding gold nuggets, I get it. But start praying; it is rewarding. He hears and delights in us as we pray to Him. I remind you to be thankful to Him for His answers to your prayers. It is a part of the gladness that the Holy Spirit pours upon us as we spend time in prayer. Let the joy of the Lord fill you as you lift up those who lead our church.

Here is a list of our leaders and their ministries:

- Jonathan Evans – lead pastor Alissa Evans – Elim Kids ministries (support in many other areas)
- Bill King – associate pastor Ann-marie King – Elim Women's ministries, Connection Point owner (support in other areas)
- Joe Grasso – assistant pastor Julie Grasso – Worship team (support in other areas)
- Leighton Smith – Youth pastor Jody Smith - Worship team & Youth ministries support
- Brandon Abbasi – Celebrate Recovery men's leader.
Polly Meadows - Celebrate Recovery women's leader
- Mike Conway – Elim Sound/Media & Diaconate Board chairman Candy Conway – Treasurer & Elim Sound/Media support
- Dawn Whittaker – Victory Transformation Director Bill Whittaker – Elim Worship team & Victory Transformation
- Diana Desens – Prayer Chain leader
- Dean Wright – Desens House Director Alicia Vann – Desens House Leader
- Shelly King – Elim Worship Leader
- Rachel Stahl – Small Groups Director/Leader
- Small Group leaders

I encourage you to ask our Lord who *you* should be praying for. Then get to it. Don't get lost in your day and forget to spend that time in prayer. Set an alarm on your phone for a specific time. Maybe it becomes the first thing you do when your child or children go down for a nap or quiet time. Maybe it's the first thing you do when the coffee cup hits your hand. It's your decision. All I ask is to make it consistent, and if you miss, that's ok. Just refocus so you are successful the next time. He is a gracious Father who watched as His Son our Lord and Savior took the punishment for our sins on the cross, so His desire is for our growth and success.