

# I Peter 2:9-10 "A Missional Community"

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[ 0 : 00 ] You are listening to a message from Southwood Presbyterian Church in Huntsville, Alabama. Our passion is to experience and express grace. Join us.

Thank you all. Beautiful, beautiful reminder of our hope. We started talking last Sunday about being a biblical community, the things that God's Word tells us about a church that God would use to storm the gates of hell, to bring revival, renewal.

And we saw last week that it must begin with our being Christ-centered, focused on Jesus, His person, His cross, His Word, His body.

That's our first core commitment as a church, committed to being Christ-centered. It has implications for us.

We're going to talk about those over the next few weeks. What does it mean when you're Christ-centered? What else does that look like? This morning, talking about being a missional community, a community on mission together.

[ 1 : 14 ] Now, when you think about it, most groups of people have a mission that brings them together and unites them. A sense of purpose. A definition of success that the group kind of unites around.

In fact, you know, as we speak, there are football teams across the country beginning to practice with national championship aspirations in mind. All right? That's where we want to go.

Every player on the team is working toward that goal of standing there in January, holding the trophy with the confetti coming down around them. That's what they're working towards.

Many of you work for businesses where being successful means making money, paying off for shareholders, perhaps other things too.

But the bottom line is the bottom line. You've got to make money to keep going. Like my family, many of you are members of a neighborhood pool or a club of some sort or another where the goal, the purpose of its existence is to provide benefits, services to those who are members of that club.

[ 2 : 23 ] Right? That purpose, that's what's going on, why they get together. And that goal of benefiting those who are a part of a group is so normal to us, whether it's a team or a club or a business.

How can we benefit each other? That's often the way we approach church too, isn't it? It's the consumer mentality of how is the church making me feel?

What services does the church provide my family? How does it reflect on me or contribute to my personal success in life? Can we admit that those are often the things we think of as the mission of the church?

We might not call it the mission of the church, but we think that's the purpose. That's why I would want to be a part of the church. That's what I'm looking for in a church. Don't we often look at it that way?

No, we're talking about being a community, a group, connecting relationally with each other. And that's valuable, isn't it? Having those relationships, but not merely community for community's sake.

[ 3 : 32 ] That's not the mission of the church of Jesus Christ. And in fact, the Bible says it's quite the opposite. Did you know, for instance, that we could keep every single one of our members happy and still not accomplish the mission of the church?

Did you know that we could meet budget 30 years in a row and fail to achieve the mission of the church? Did you know that we could grow numerically, double in size, and look like we're doing great things and still not achieve the mission God has given to us as His church?

We see the mission of the church all over the place in God's Word. But I want to read us just a couple verses from 1 Peter as we get started and then we'll pray.

Peter is writing in chapter 2 of his letter about the church that God is building on the cornerstone of Jesus. And in verse 9, he gives us this clear statement of our identity and mission as those following Jesus.

This is God's holy Word. 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.

[ 4 : 55 ] Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people. Once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.

Let's pray. Jesus, would you be with us this morning? Would you, as we have just prayed in song, would you abide with your church?

Your church everywhere and especially, Father, would you abide here in our presence this morning with this church for the sake of your kingdom? God, would you abide with us?

Show us what you would have for us. Show us Jesus by your Holy Spirit. We ask in His name.

Amen. Here's the bottom line this morning.

I'm not going to trick you or hide it from you. For this aspect of being a biblical community, a church God uses. Last week we said that the church God uses must remain focused on the person of Jesus.

[ 5 : 58 ] Now, today, as we are, a church centered on Jesus, what does it look like? It must be on the mission of God together.

Now, that's very simple, but it's a harder mission than you think. And it's a more glorious mission than you could even imagine that we are called to and put here for.

So, before we come back to 1 Peter 2 and other passages that tell us about that, let's remember briefly what God's mission in this world is. We must be on His mission, not just whatever we want to do.

We must be on His mission together. And the Bible tells us that God is up to something from the very beginning. In the very beginning, God creates a world to display His glory, to give Himself in relationship to people, and those people then in turn are to reflect His glory over the whole creation. That's God's mission, His glory being known in relationship and shared everywhere, filling the earth. But we messed that up, didn't we?

[ 7 : 16 ] Looking at ourselves, we didn't reflect His image, but instead rebelled against Him and wanted to do things our own way. Brought a curse on the entire creation that was intended to display His great glory.

And so, God sets about, from early in the Bible, a mission of redeeming and restoring all of His glorious, now broken, creation.

Especially those broken people that He made in His image. God is on a restoration mission. He is making all things new, Revelation 21.

Bringing us back into relationship with Him that we were created for and renovating all of creation, Romans 8, so that it reflects His glory perfectly again.

His kingdom coming on earth as He always intended. And just as God first created people to live in relationship with Him and then to reflect His glory to the whole creation, in that same way, God on His restoration mission is up to the same thing.

[ 8 : 31 ] giving Himself for people in relationship, to restore that relationship with them, and then giving them to others to restore those people in relationship.

Everyone and everything restored to the glory that He intended for it at first. You can see this pattern in the story of Abraham. Peter read for us earlier as we confessed.

God says, I will bless you. We'll have this special relationship and then you will be a blessing to others, to the nations. And perhaps the clearest Old Testament image of this is the entire nation of Israel.

All of them told in Exodus 19 what their mission is as God's people. Verse 4, You yourselves have seen what I did to the Egyptians, how I bore you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself.

Now therefore, if you'll indeed obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession among all peoples. That's who they are. They have this special relationship with God, right?

[ 9 : 41 ] As His treasured possession. God's brought them into that relationship, but then they have this glorious mission. All the earth is mine, and you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy

nation.

They have a glorious mission to be priests, to restore relationship with the rest of creation, to represent God and pass along His glory to everyone around them.

That's what that means. You don't see it there maybe in that verse, but that's what priests do. They stand between God and the people. In the nation of Israel, there was one tribe out of the twelve.

They were the priests, right? They stood between God and the rest of the nation. Sacrifices, prayers, speaking for God to the people.

That was their function. They represented Him to the rest of the nation. But then God says here that the entire nation will be a kingdom of priests.

[10:50] It's not Israel alone that God wants to have relationship with. Who's He interested in? The whole earth. All the earth is mine, and so I need a group of you to be priests to represent me to them.

You be priests, Israel. Passing along the glory of restored relationship. Restoring every person, every plant, every policy that's gone wrong to the way I intended this world to be.

Israel struggled with that. But that restoration mission reached its climax, of course, in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, who restored relationship with God ultimately through His cross.

He died to see us restored in our relationship with God. And He sends His followers, His people, out on that glorious mission of restoration, doesn't He?

1 Peter 2 is just one great picture of that. It actually quotes that Exodus 19 passage. Who are we?

[12:01] We, like Israel, have this special relationship with God because He restored it by His mercy. That's the cross. And now we have not only the relationship, we have this mission as priests to carry that on with everyone else.

To proclaim His excellencies. To tell His glory, right? Everywhere. That's why we're priests.

We're a special people in order that something might happen, that we have a purpose and a mission proclaiming His excellencies everywhere so God's mission can be accomplished.

In other places, the church is called ministers of reconciliation, ambassadors of the King. Jesus tells His followers before He ascends, you will be my witnesses to the ends of the earth.

And as you go throughout all creation, what are you going to do? Make disciples of all nations.

Others who reflect the glory of God all over His creation.

[13:11] Do you begin to see why it's not enough for us as a community just to be about ourselves? It's not enough, is it? It's not enough just to exist for making each other happy and enjoying life together.

All of these descriptions that I just read of the church's calling turn us outward toward the rest of creation. God's got a glorious mission that He calls us into.

It's a mission of restoration. That as we know His glories, we declare His glories to others. As we experience His justice, we share His justice with others.

As we taste the wonder of His grace, we offer grace to others. Experience and express grace.

That's our shorthand mission statement here.

God gives Himself in relationship with you over and over when you don't deserve it. Experience grace. And then God sends you to give yourself in relationship with others over and over again when they don't deserve it.

[14:32] That's what we're called to. Being Christ-centered means we must be outward-facing, priests who represent God to others, proclaiming His excellencies so that the earth is filled with His glory.

See, that's why God created you. It's why God called you into this community. Did you know you were created for greatness like that? For glory? For being a part of something that's eternal? That will always matter?

Don't you want that? It's what He made you for. It's why He's in relationship with you and loves you and cares about you. He has something great and glorious for you.

Bishop William Temple said, the church is the only society that exists for the benefit of those who are not its members. Dietrich Bonhoeffer said it this way, the church is the church only when it exists for others.

The sad thing is that through history, the story of church history is one of Christians and churches forgetting this over and over and needing to remember it and come back to it.

[ 15 : 47 ] They've neglected this mission that God gives them. But when a rekindling of love for Christ has happened in the church, it inevitably and invariably involves the church being on this mission as a result.

If you go back to the early church and read through the book of Acts, they go off on this mission that Jesus has sent them on with great passion, right? Sharing the good news of a risen Savior. Caring for each other in incredible ways and as one Roman emperor even noticed, caring for their poor too.

But as you study church history, time and time again, that's been forgotten. What usually happens is something like this. The church gets some cultural influence.

Having shared some of that good news, it begins to take root and they begin to feel comfortable and see their impact on the society and that missionary impulse fades.

It doesn't seem nearly as important anymore. The church settles in and gets comfortable pursuing the same goals and missions as everyone else. Existing for themselves.

[ 17 : 01 ] Personal success, wealth, power, comfort, fame becomes the driving mission for which individuals and the church together exists and with that as the driving mission of people's lives, the church is relegated to spiritualizing birth and death and maybe some occasional moral guidance for how I'm supposed to live while I run the same rat race everybody else is running.

Church historian Richard Loveless explains that this was exactly what Jonathan Edwards found in America in the early 1700s. The people in his congregation were respectable and had a rote orthodoxy.

Quote, but their ultimate concerns were not God and His kingdom but land and the pursuit of affluence. Skip that, it's too convicting.

Let's see. Actually, what he's describing is an approach to life that if we're honest, most of us can identify with pretty quickly, can't we? It looks something like this.

An approach to life where at the center of everything is myself. And everything else in my life works to make me feel like a successful self.

[ 18 : 23 ] What I want to be, this idealized version of myself. Everything contributes to that and it revolves around that idea of me being successful however I define that.

In Huntsville, Alabama, you've got to acknowledge that many people have spirituality as a key part of that. Even Jesus. It's important to their overall image of what a good self is.

You've got to sprinkle some going to church and some knowing some phrases and being with the right kind of people in order to be who you want to be. But the biblical picture is actually quite different.

It's just a small change but Jesus actually moves into the center. His mission, His glory is what I'm about and why I exist and that defines my identity.

That changes how I spend my time. Rearranges what relationships I invest in. It transforms my purpose in the workplace. It's an entirely reoriented life.

[ 19 : 29 ] When Jesus is the hub not merely a spoke on the wheel. It makes all the difference. It actually drives and changes all the rest of what I'm involved in.

And when what we call the Great Awakening came to Jonathan Edwards' congregation the Holy Spirit used the doctrines of sin and Jesus' death on the cross as we talked about last week to show them the glory of God afresh.

They'd lost sight of it. Here's what he writes. The gravity of covetousness which had drawn their hearts to earthly concerns was reversed and merchants began to neglect their business to talk about God and their souls.

The Word of God suddenly had free course in congregational worship since the laity were now in touch with the reasons described in the minister's sermons. Hymns were now a delight rather than a habit and a duty.

The lay people's passivity and witness gave way to a new concern for others. You hear that? Their restored relationship with God that they'd never really experienced like this before created a passion to spread that restoration to others around them.

[ 20 : 41 ] And what happened? the great awakening was born. A great revival across a whole region of this country. Stop and think about that.

That may seem crazy. You may think that doesn't happen anymore. Can you imagine the impact when not just one person but a whole community of people together see Jesus move from a spoke

to the hub?

See Jesus move from being something nice to sprinkle on the top to being what drives everything that I do? Can you imagine how it impacts not just a Sunday morning worship service but lots of your neighbors and the city's business and schools and government?

we now see our homes as mission outposts. Our money as mission ammunition. Our jobs and our free time as mission opportunities for Jesus.

It's all for Jesus. The Bible says God has made you for so much more than merely seeing how much money you can make.

[ 21 : 48 ] Seeing how many people you can impress and get to think you're great. Seeing how early you can retire and with how many toys. He's got more in mind for you than that.

He's made you to know and share His glory. And we haven't even touched what it's like. We're just getting to know Him and more and more growing in that.

He's got that. He wants you to continue growing in that. His word tells each of us to offer our bodies as living sacrifices. Romans 12. That whether we eat or drink or whatever we do we should do it all for the glory of God.

1 Corinthians 10. That whatever we do in word or deed we should do it as unto the Lord. Colossians 3. And when a community of people facing outward on mission like that gathers together it is a force on God's mission for God's glory.

glory. That's what He's creating here. And one of the greatest challenges to this is that God calls us to stay in many of the same places while we have this uncommon mission that we're pursuing.

[ 23 : 06 ] He calls us to very normal jobs to engage with normal people to participate in many normal activities activities and y'all can we just be honest it's simply hard to engage in normal life without normal goals and motivations isn't it?

It's really hard to be a part of a community and a culture where you're doing everything that everybody else is doing but your goals and motivations and the way you go about it is different. That's just not easy.

And yet it would in a sense be easier to find a mountain somewhere to go live on the top of that mountain and just think about Jesus all day every day wouldn't it? If Jesus was going to be at the center it would be easier up on a mountaintop somewhere and God has put you where?

Right here in Huntsville and he's called you actually to have Jesus and his mission shape every moment of every day right where you are.

One of the most important things to remember in that is that it's it's a mission of word and deed. Whatever we do in word or in deed those things must stay connected to each other.

[ 24 : 23 ] We proclaim his excellencies with our words and our actions. Jesus did it the Bible teaches it we say it in our core commitments you can see there in your bulletin but what does that mean?

What does it mean that we're about God's mission every time we speak and act? Well think of it this way there's a reason that grocery stores give you samples you know you've had them before don't act like you haven't been to Sam's or Costco there's a reason they do that it's not just to keep you there shopping longer so you'll spend more money why do they do it?

Because they know that you're more likely to buy something that you've tasted and enjoyed. One of our favorite dinners that Christy makes our family is a shrimp pasta she may never have tried making it but she sampled it at the grocery store one day and when she tasted it and loved it she turned around and walked back to the counter and did what?

Do you have a recipe for that? What did you use to make this? Can I have that recipe? You see the recipe tells people how they find the life that God intended for them but the taste makes them long for it.

We are to declare that true significance is found in the glory of God that's the recipe and we are to demonstrate the glory of His kingdom in how we work and love and serve that's the taste.

[ 25 : 58 ] Think about it people don't want to hear about a holy God who's worthy of everything from someone who lives to please Himself. People don't want to hear about a God of grace and forgiveness from someone who condemns them and looks down on them.

People don't want to hear about a God who loves the poor and the oppressed from rich people who try hard to avoid them. It doesn't match up does it?

The taste and the recipe the word and the deed churches that God has used in bringing revival have kept both aspects of that restoration mission together.

That both are vitally important word and deed the recipe and the sample you could say the blueprint of your new home that tells you how to build it and the model home in that new neighborhood that you walk through and it makes you long to live there right?

The church is to be that model home a taste of heaven on earth and that requires a community living and loving together.

[ 27 : 09 ] That great work that God is doing is global it's happening all over the place but he has placed us right here in Huntsville. We use this image as a reminder of that that Southwood S in the middle of Huntsville community for the sake of the city.

God's put us here for a reason. That olive branch that you see up top there and you see in our logo all over the place is to be a visual reminder to us that we are here to extend God's peace to share God's restoration mission.

We're not here for ourselves. We're here to extend God's grace with all of creation and every person in it. How can we do that together here?

Mostly you're going to get to talk about that outside of this room but just to whet your appetite. Turn and look out those windows for a minute. Just you're not going to say anything unusual but just so you'll remember outside there's cars driving by right now a bunch of them just in these few seconds lonely neighbor after lonely neighbor drives by.

Some of them have visibly broken lives. Some of them look really successful when they drive by or when you drive by their home but they have broken hearts.

[ 28 : 36 ] People in our city suffer from generational poverty. Schools in our city struggle with systemic racial injustice. Neighbors on the street you live on battle addiction and depression and an eternal sense of emptiness even though life seems to be going really well.

And we are sent. We who know what it's like to battle addiction and suffer depression and feel empty. We who've been oppressed and poor and who've struggled and still don't quite know how to make life work the way we'd like to.

We are actually called and sent on a mission of restoration to them. We have the good news of a kingdom and a king who will right every wrong.

Y'all, God sends us to this city. How can we drive by and slip behind our garage doors when Huntsville cries out for restoration?

They don't know those words to use. Many don't know who it is they're looking for but they're desperate for hope, for healing, and you know the king.

[ 29 : 54 ] I know you can't combat all this alone. You can't go out and fix Huntsville, save the city. That's why God gives us each other. It's why we must lock arms in community together and be on mission.

You need brothers and sisters with a range of different gifts to run a Jobs for Life program. You need a small group to pray with you through how to impact your neighborhood and labor alongside you for the kingdom as you do that.

You need a connect community starting in a few weeks to spur you on to Christ-centered missional living and equip you with God's word to know how to love your coworkers.

workers. We're not doing these relational community building things to play church or just to make each other feel good for an hour every Sunday so we can go back to life.

We're diving in here together because we can't accomplish this mission alone. Community is a catalyst for this mission. We need each other.

[ 31 : 04 ] Amen? Amen? Amen? Amen? Amen? Amen? Amen? Amen? Amen? Amen? Amen? Amen? Amen? And the mission is so big that it must drive us to our knees which is where we'll pick up the conversation next Sunday.

We need our Father's help. But as we reorient our lives around our Savior and His glory and His mission we must be on God's mission together.

Matter of fact, Jesus doesn't just tell us that that's what we must do. He shows us that, doesn't He? He keeps word and deed perfectly connected to each other.

Jesus comes and calls us to a mission of giving ourselves away and He demonstrates for us what that looks like and empowers us to give our lives away by giving His for us.

Jesus lays down the comforts of heaven. He takes a hit to His bottom line so to speak. He operates on a schedule that wasn't His preferred schedule for us to restore our relationship with our Father. [ 32 : 23 ] If your house is a mission outpost and your money is mission ammunition, if it's all about Jesus, His body and blood is mission fuel for you as you go out where He sends you.

He empowers us for what He calls us to. That's what this body and blood is about. That as we go out on the glorious mission of restoration, He goes with us and in us as we live for Him. Remember what Jesus said to His disciples the night that He was betrayed. He sat with them. He took bread. He broke it. He gave it to them as I, ministering in His name, give this bread to you. He said, take, eat. This is my body broken for you. Do this in remembrance of me. Remember how I've loved you. And in the same manner after giving thanks He took the cup saying this cup is the new covenant in my blood.

Shed for many for the forgiveness of sins. Drink from it. All of you. Jesus gives us Himself.

[ 33 : 38 ] And so if you've trusted Jesus and if you've connected with a branch of His church, it doesn't have to be this particular one. This is His table, not ours. Then come and celebrate together the Savior who goes with us as He calls us to join Him in His mission.

And if you don't know Jesus, if you haven't trusted Him yourself, I invite you too to come in just a minute as we gather around these tables. You're welcome to come too, to pray with us, to watch and consider what Jesus has said.

But I invite you not to take His body and blood. Don't take the bread and the juice as you come, but rather consider what Jesus has offered you.

Consider the mission that He says, this is what you were created for and how significant you are. And you have to have me to be restored to what God intended for you. Consider that.

We'd love to talk with you and pray with you about that. Let me pray and then we'll come to this table together. Jesus, thank You for not leaving us alone to do something too big for us.

[ 34 : 50 ] Thank You for giving Yourself for us and for empowering us for what You have called us to. Would You set aside these very common elements to a special purpose in our hearts that we would be strengthened to live even this afternoon and then beyond that for Your glory.

We ask in Your name. Amen. For more information, visit us online at [southwood.org](http://southwood.org).  
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