

Esther 8:1-17 - Missional Living

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Preacher: Guest: Dr. Gary Purdy

- [0 : 0 0] You are listening to a message from Southwood Presbyterian Church in Huntsville, Alabama. Our passion is to experience and express grace. Join us.
- Well, good morning. It is good to be with you. Not only have we had a long association awareness of Southwood, Jean LaRue and I have been in a pastor's group for a long time.
- I always told him, I said, you are the most interesting man in the world from the Dos Equis commercial. And by contrast, I feel like the least interesting man in the world. We have learned and wept and walked with each other through a lot.
- So I'm grateful to be a part here with you this morning. I asked Will, knowing you're going through the study of Ephesians, if I should just step in right where you left off.
- He says, please don't. So he said, maybe it'd be good to do something different. So we're going to do something really different and step into an Old Testament narrative. The challenge is going to be we're going to step into the middle of the book.
- [1 : 0 5] So if I just had to stand up and read it right now, your brain would be mush by the end of the passage. So it will help if we kind of approach it like a play and do a scene at a time.
- So we'll look at the scripture in the body of the message. Okay. We'll be in Esther chapter 8. If you want to turn here, turn there, it'll also be on the screen. Let me pray for us as we come to God's word.
- Father, you've been wooing and drawing our hearts through words penned by people weak and wounded by the fall of a hope that takes our breath away.
- We've celebrated the sacraments, that mystery of your presence being manifest in an unusual way that we don't even fully understand.
- Your scripture tells us that when we gather here, what's happening here, though much is pressing in on us from outside this room, that it's a picture. It's the closest that we get to the heavenly courts and the presence of Christ, the fullness of Christ's body, worshiping in patterns that have been long established that mirror what's happening in heaven.
- [2 : 2 4] As we live in this already-not-yet season, would you touch and woo and take our breath away and melt our hearts by your story?
- As we step into an ancient story, would we find ourselves there? Would the dots connect to our lives? And may we have a sense that you're wooing and calling, whether we've never believed before or have heard this story over and over again.
- Oh, Spirit, would you be so present as to exalt Jesus in this story and meet us, we pray. In Jesus' name, amen. Amen. Crazy busy pace.
- 24-7 connectivity. Aren't you glad how technology has saved you so much time? The insecurity, financial and otherwise, in a post-11 world equals overwhelmed.
- Culturally, more than any other time that I've been an adult, I just sense, I'm here not just busy, I'm here, I'm completely overwhelmed.

[3 : 33] Young families, young moms show up on this door just so glad to be in the doors because life can feel so overwhelming. The pace just keeps ramping up.

And then you turn on Fox News or MSNBC. And you discover we live in such a polarized culture, they're so afraid of one another, we can't even hear one another talk.

We're just screaming over one another and missing one another, and there's this huge cultural divide. And then you think about being the church, where you know a big part of what we're called to be is outward facing, impacting our culture.

And overwhelm in the midst of a culture where we cannot hear one another leaves us feeling guilty and often not knowing where to turn as the people of God.

But what we're going to unfold as we step into this ancient story this morning is how an overwhelmed people of God live missionally in a culture where we can barely hear one another.

[4 : 40] How can an already overwhelmed people who are called to live missional lives live missionally in a culture where we can't hear one another? Esther chapter 8 will unfold the story in four scenes.

It's a scene, just to help you remember, of a ring, a plea, a decree, and a party. A ring, a plea, a decree, and a party.

Here's scene one. Esther chapter 8 verse 1. On that day, King Ahasuerus gave to Queen Esther the house of Haman, the enemy of the Jews.

And Mordecai came before the king, for Esther had told what he was to her. And the king took off his signet ring for which he had taken from Haman and gave it to Mordecai.

And Esther set Mordecai over the house of Haman. Now there's a tremendous backstory that's been going on. Let me help you fill it in if you've heard it before or maybe have not heard it before.

[5 : 44] Ahasuerus was king of Persia about 450 years before Jesus came to earth. It's in present-day Iraq, Iran. It was kind of his area, massive territory.

And he was the king on the block. With incredible wealth, they had captured from all the nations. And he decides to throw an incredible, world's most raucous fraternity party for six months.

And they don't go to class. I know some of you went to school like that too, but probably not so much in Huntsville. They partied for six months. At the end of the six months, during the last week, he says, let's let everybody in on this party because he was just kind of throwing a party for his inner circle buddies who extended his rule around his empire.

But they have a party for the whole people. And he gets this great idea as he and everyone else is completely sloshed. Let's have my, according to Ricky Bobby, smoking hot wife Vashti come and perform for us.

I mean, every girl's dream, right? To come before a room full of drunken men and dance. Queen Vashti says, I'm not coming.

[7 : 00] I've got my own party with my own girls. We're staying here. See, you didn't tell kings no back then. Telling a king no meant you're gone.

And that's what happened with Vashti. She was smoking hot, but she was no more. The king, to fill her place, decides, you know what we're going to do?

The first episode of The Bachelor. We're going to invite the most beautiful women from all over my empire to come and try out to be my wife.

In the midst of these women from all over the empire coming like in all bachelor-like, you know, craziness, to try out to be the queen. There is one who is discovered.

She's a little bit undercover, but she is stunning. Her name is Esther. She's orphaned. This is a time where the Israelites had come back to the land, but she is still a part of a small minority who live abroad, having been taken in the Babylonian empire.

[8 : 08] She's being raised by an uncle who we saw about. Her uncle is Mordecai. Mordecai had great respect as a servant of the king, but he instructed Esther to keep it quiet that they were Jews.

But Esther's beauty was such that she could not be ignored, and she was invited into the contest, and she replaces Vashti as this beautiful queen of King Ahasuerus.

Meanwhile, there's a prime minister that gets appointed. His name is Haman. Haman loved his power, and it was driven by pride, and the king issued an edict at his request that wherever he would go, people would have to bow.

Mordecai was a servant in the king's court, and he was at the city gate one day when Haman walks by, and he doesn't bow, and Haman could not get over it. As his wealth and his stature and his power grew, he still couldn't deal with the fact that Mordecai would not bow.

So he came up with a plot. He came up with a plea that became an edict of the king because he had discovered that Mordecai was a Jew. And the edict with the king's signet ring that went out across the empire was this.

[9 : 25] Every Jewish man, woman, and child were to be killed because they were a threat to the empire. Mordecai hears about the plot and comes out dressed in sackcloth and public weeping, and then he goes privately to Esther, who the king still does not know is a Jew.

And he says, It is for such a time as this that God has appointed for you to go before the king. Esther protested because she had kind of kept undercover Christian or undercover Jew working up till this point, but also culturally working against her was for you could not request to come to the king's presence.

The king had to request you. The only exception was if a golden scepter was extended, then your life would not be taken. Otherwise, it would.

She risks and she goes. Meanwhile, Haman is thinking of all the glory he's going to receive because one night, King Ahasuerus falls asleep and can't stay asleep, wakes up and reads his chronicles where he discovers that Mordecai, his servant, had exposed an assassination attempt against him and saved his life, but Mordecai was never awarded.

Meanwhile, King Ahasuerus is planning to award him. Haman is not knowing it. Haman has a way to take the life by building a gallows to take Mordecai's life. But at the second feast, when Esther comes clean on her identity as a Jew, the edict that Haman has proclaimed, his participation in a plot that would erase her people, he's exposed.

[11 : 21] And the very gallows upon which Mordecai was to die, Haman is executed. And so what we find here as we open up the storyline in this first scene in chapter 8, is Mordecai becomes prime minister.

It's marked by receiving a signet ring. Two Jews oppressed in the land with a signet ring, a position of influence to do redemptive things in the kingdom for their people.

Scene 1. Scene 2. Let's look at the passage, the plea. It's a ring, a plea, verse 3. Then Esther spoke again to the king.

She fell at his feet and wept, and pleaded with him to avert the evil plan, Haman the Agagite. That's easy for you to say. The Agagite.

And the plot that he had devised against the Jews. Here's what's interesting. Agagite also means Amalekite. Now if you, like, paid attention in Sunday school growing up, you may have a little distant memory of Amalekites.

[12 : 29] When Israel was going in the wilderness to enter the land, they opposed Israel so dramatically that God had to show up through Moses holding his hands up.

And when King Saul came into power, he was commissioned to completely, completely annihilate the Amalekites. But you remember what happens? It's where God's favor falls from him.

God's favor falls because he did not completely wipe out the Amalekites. And here we have Mordecai, a Jew, a descendant of Saul, facing an Amalekite in a foreign land again.

Interesting thing, Herod, who was in charge when Jesus was born, was an Amalekite as well. This ongoing conflict. Look at verse 4.

When the king held out the golden scepter to Esther, okay, she's going to be alive, Esther rose and stood before the king, and she said, If it please the king, and if I have found favor in his sight, and if the thing seems right before him, and I'm pleasing in his eyes, boy, she's building a case, isn't she, let an order be written to revoke or reverse the letters devised by Haman the Agagite, the son of Hamadathah, which he wrote to destroy the Jews who are in all the provinces of the king.

[13 : 49] For how can I bear to see the calamity that is coming to my people? Or how can I bear to see the destruction of my kindred? Then King Ahasuerus said to Queen Esther and to Mordecai the Jew, Behold, I have given Esther the house of Haman, and they have hanged him on the gallows, because he intended to lay hands on the Jews.

But you may write as you please with regard to the Jews in the name of the king, and seal it with the king's ring. For an edict written in the name of the king and sealed with the king's ring cannot be revoked.

He's actually saying two things. I can't make Haman's edict go away. But if you can figure out a way, Mordecai and Esther, to preserve the lives of the people in light of that edict going out, I will let you take my signet green.

And in her plea for her people, because of the great effect of the curse, living in a fallen world, perpetrated by a fallen man, Haman, she intervenes with a plea, a need that moves her to tears at the feet of the king, to intercede not just on her welfare, but on behalf of the welfare of the entire people.

In response to her plea, King Ahasuerus gives an okay for an alternate decree to be made. In scene three, we see that decree.

[15 : 17] Verse nine. The king's scribes were summoned at that time in the third month, which is the month of Sivan, on the 23rd day. And an edict was written according to all that Mordecai commanded concerning the Jews.

So the satraps and the governors and the officials of the provinces from India to Ethiopia, that's a stretch, 127 provinces to each province in its own script.

Can you imagine the translation work? And to each people in its own language, and also to the Jews in their script and their language. And he wrote in the name of King Ahasuerus and sealed it with the king's signet ring.

Then he sent letters by mounted couriers, riding on swift horses that were used in the king's service, bred from the royal stud. I like that. Saying that the king allowed the Jews who were in every city to gather and defend their lives, to destroy, kill, and to annihilate.

That's in Esther chapter three. That's a reversal of the command. Israel, Jews were supposed to be destroyed, killed, annihilated. And that they could do that against any armed force of any people or province that might attack them, children and women included, and to plunder their goods.

[16 : 34] On one day throughout all the provinces of King Ahasuerus, on the 13th day of the 12th month, which is the month of Adair, a copy of what was written was to be issued as a decree in every province, being publicly displayed to all peoples.

And the Jews were to be ready on that day to take vengeance on their enemies. So the couriers, mounted on their swift horses that were used in the king's service, rode out and hurriedly, urged by the king's command, and the decree was issued in Susa, the citadel or the capital.

You see what happened? Esther and Mordecai penned a decree that would give Jews the right to defend themselves, to thwart the decree that was made by Haman. What are they doing? They're reversing the curse.

The curse that had been pronounced upon the Jews, that intersected their lives in a very profound, real way, not just for them, but for all their kindred spread throughout the kingdom of Ahasuerus.

They reversed the curse. So that instead of a decree of death, the Jews, the people of God, could experience a decree that would bring life.

[17 : 48] It's a ring. It's a plea. It's a decree that turns into the foreseen a party. Look at verses 15 through 17.

Then Mordecai went out from the presence of the king in royal robes of blue and white, with a golden crown and a robe of fine linen and purple. The city of Susa shouted and rejoiced.

This is how Haman thought he was going to dress. And now we find Mordecai as the curse has been reversed in his place. Verse 16, The Jews had light and gladness and joy and honor.

They're restored from shame, restored from the curse. And in every province and in every city, wherever the king's command and his edict reached, there was gladness and joy among the Jews, a feast and a holiday.

And get this, And many from the peoples of the country declared themselves Jews they wanted in the party, for fear of the Jews had fallen all on them.

[18 : 51] You see the wonder of a story, of a ring for such a time as this, a plea that met the woundedness, the fears, and yet the hope for a reversal by a decree that turned into a party for the whole country to celebrate a reversal of the curse so everyone else wanted in.

You see the beauty of this story in those four scenes is it really helps us understand the whole gospel storyline that's woven throughout the pages of scripture. The ring corresponds to the story of creation where we're made to flourish and exercise benevolent rule that brings flourishing and shalom and wholeness to all of earth.

But the fall means we're all broken and wounded. Despite having the image of glory in us, we limp big time because of the effects of the curse in our world.

The biblical story goes on from the fall though as you open the pages of the New Testament to redemption. of one who came to issue an edict and a decree that would make all things new and the good news of the gospel.

And one day there will be a party like no other party before when every tear will be wiped away from our eyes and everything is made new.

[20 : 18] Heaven comes down and everything that's sad becomes untrue. Esther's story was the gospel story. Mordecai's involvement with Esther in reversing the curse pictures the gospel storyline.

And it pictures the storyline of each of our lives as well. Connect to that feeling of overwhelm. Connect to that sense of awareness if you're a part of Christ's church and probably even if you're not a part of church, you know the church is called to mission.

What does missional living mean for an overwhelmed people in a culture where we can't even hear one another?

Based on this story, I would suggest missional living is this. Missional living is reversing the curse right where you feel the need for it most.

Missional living is reversing the curse right where you feel the need for it most. Now because the church I'm at at Oak Mountain Prez and this church really treasure the gospel, we probably share some similarities.

[21 : 39] Here's what we're finding out at Oak Mountain that you may have experienced as well. Coming to Oak Mountain for many people has offered and I've just been there a year and a half so I have like zilch contribution to this hardly at all.

It's just the faithfulness of the free gospel being preached powerfully. Most people have found in the church a fresh drink of the gospel that makes their souls say yes after having been beat up and bruised by the legalistic church for a long time.

Then we've also experienced real safe community where you don't really have to pretend and can come clean about the struggles in your life. I mean, a fresh drink of the gospel, a safe community where I can come clean and hope in the gospel and we're like, home run.

We're done. We're here. Ah, yes. It's kind of like we've hit a triple and hitting a triple is really exciting. The whole crowd cheers.

You dust yourself off, but you still got to get home. The richness of the gospel that we experience between us and Christ and in community with one another is the same power that needs to bubble over in our lives with the needs that we experience right alongside real and normal people with whom we do life.

[23 : 03] Missional living is where you feel the weight of the curse the most and you begin dreaming and moving to reverse it. If you've read Jeremiah 29 before, it talks about the commission to the people of God prior to the story of Esther when the people were in captivity and Jeremiah's in Jerusalem and riding back.

I won't turn there for the sake of time, but he says, hey, people are saying you're about out of here, so don't invest in the city. He's saying you're going to be there for 70 years.

You are exiles, but here's how I want you to function. Get jobs. Build homes. Cultivate gardens.

Have children. Give away children. And in the midst of just the normal stuff in life that you're already doing, seek the welfare, the Hebrew word actually, seek the shalom, the fullness, the wholeness, the peace, the world as it should ought to be.

Seek the welfare or the shalom of the city and you know what the promise is next? And in it, you will find your welfare, your shalom.

[24 : 17] For a people who have experienced a fresh drink of the gospel in a way that's transforming your lives and the contents of your friendships and families, that good news in the midst of your brokenness is extended to those outside the walls of this church in breathtaking ways, but in the normal stuff of life.

Thursday night, I got together with a group of college students from our church and we watched way, way back. It's really weird anytime Steve Carell is in a serious movie. the first line, the first scene slayed me.

Steve Carell's character, I think he's Trent, is dating a woman who has two kids. I don't know where they found an old station wagon, but do you remember old station wagons?

If you saw the movie, there's a back seat that faces back and there's a little boy named Duncan who's about 13, as awkward as he can possibly be, shoulders slumped over, who's just trying to look out to get away from what else is happening in the car.

He wants nothing of it. Trent refuses to let him be disengaged and so he begins conversation like this, Duncan, what are you?

[25 : 35] On a scale of one to ten, what are you? Duncan, like most adolescent boys, says, I don't know. He doesn't want to answer, comes up with a grunt.

Trent keeps pressing, no, what are you? Like ten being really good, one being nothing, what are you on a scale of one to ten? Duncan finally relents and says, I don't know, like six or a seven?

Trent goes, no, no, you're not a six or a seven, that's way too high. You're a three. That's what you are.

You're a three. I'm undone. I know the feeling of shame so powerful where people treat you as if you're a three.

It's like I may as well have been in the back seat with Duncan. As the storyline goes on, he finds his way to a water park, which is run by a guy who probably did not win, most likely to succeed in high school.

[26 : 47] His name is Owen. Owen leads a group of people who are like an island of misfit toys at this little water park. But every life that Owen touches, even in their awkwardness where the world would bring shame, you know what Owen does?

he lifts their heads. He treats them as the image bearers that they are. His own story filled with shame, but wherever Owen goes, he lifts people's heads from the shame.

That's what the people of God are called to do. In a world that feels like a three, we lift their heads to see the beauty and wonder of being created in the image of God.

Here's what I've found within the evangelical church is we're really strong on two of the four movements of the gospel storyline. We're big on sin and the reality of that, sometimes in really healthy ways, sometimes in very judgmental ways, and we're really big on redemption as well.

But you know what we forget in relating to people? We forget stage one, scene one, creation. That everyone, whether they name the name of Jesus or not, are image bearers, but who are also fallen, living with this deep-seated unease of I'm not okay with who I am.

[28 : 19] The people of God in every age and every sphere are people who bear the image and treat people to the image so that we are people who call out the glory and the wonder of how one another are made in the midst of the world that just presses their shame, calling you a three.

A people on mission lift the heads right in the normal stuff of life from the place of shame to a place of honor and glory so that that curse is reversed.

There's a sociologist from UVA, Charlottesville, who's really a fascinating man. I've had a chance to interact with him. His name is James Davison Hunter. He came out, he's a follower of Christ, he came out of the evangelical movement, but grew disappointed in his development at two main projects of the evangelical church in the past 30 years.

One was, we're going to change the world through sharing the gospel with individuals, and eventually the grassroots of that will just bubble up and change our culture. The other project at work in evangelicalism was the Christian right, which had a political agenda and created a huge culture war that created and helped fuel an MSNBC, Fox News kind of culture today.

I might make you mad, he said it, offers research, you get the book, you read it, weigh his arguments. He's saying, neither are ways, neither are ways to change the world and change our culture.

[29 : 56] Now he's not saying, not arguing against evangelism, okay? He's not arguing against some of the values that the religious right have advanced. He's just saying those approaches on their own will not reverse the curse.

Instead he argues, what would? which he terms faithful presence in key places that God has called us for such a time as this.

Faithful presence, just in the normal arenas in life and platforms that God has entrusted to you, where you're CEO of a company or you're wiping bottoms at home.

whatever the place, faithful presence over time for such a time as this to reverse the curse wherever we are.

As I've been trying to help people flesh out what this looks like, I've thought of it in three phases. Normally, if you think about moving out, you think of the third phase of where you have to announce good news.

[31 : 08] Who, if you're a church person, has heard before that you should announce the good news to others? You heard that? Who here feels really guilty for how little you do it?

And it's because we think we've got to start right here. A great way to think in light of the story in which we're stepping into in the gospel storyline is to remember the creation story and to live for the flourishing of shalom right where you are, where you seek the common good.

My experience has been that when I seek the common good, locked arms with people in the city, that because they have the image of God within them, they're aspiring for the same kind of things that we would want to see when all things are renewed.

And oftentimes, the church has not been in the game, but linking arms where we're seeking right where we are the common good creates an incredible dynamic for establishing common ground.

I had a friend who I was on the North Chattanooga Chamber of Commerce with who had kind of one of the wildest reputations in town, even in his mid-50s, he was a handsome looking guy, and he went for it big time in the city.

[32 : 26] In the midst of me just participating and dreaming big dreams for North Chattanooga, we began to have heart dialogue that we could never have had if I had started over here.

In fact, he wanted to change the motto of the North Chattanooga Chamber of Commerce from where you live, work, and play to where you live, work, play, and pray. I said, I'm not asking for that. But his heart was moving.

We were finding common ground as we began to dream for reversing the curse kinds of things that he knew his heart longed for because he was an image bearer. And when we're able to connect and pursue people's hearts in common ground, then we can unfold the good news.

In every sphere of life, vocation, neighborhood, recreation, just social kind of things, the gospel storyline infuses it with meaning.

I've been working with a group of lawyers and trying to say, okay, what's the worldview at work within the lawyering profession right now? Here was essentially what it was. Win at all costs, now, and build the most hours was the worldview in which many who practice law function.

[33 : 42] I said, how does that compare to the gospel storyline? I said this, do you know you're made to win? Like to flourish as a lawyer in your vocation pleases God?

It's the, when I run, I feel his pleasure of your vocation. It's great to want to flourish for the power of justice, for the welfare of your clients, for the welfare of your family.

It's wonderful to think of flourishing. But the at all cost part, that's fall. Like the at all cost really says, justice is not our ultimate goal.

The bottom line is. And then build the most hours now essentially says this, you're your own redeemer. Go for it. And the now says there is no future.

So go for it now. You know what the gospel storyline for law would be? It's simply this, we're made to flourish with justice. You know why they're lawyer jokes? Because everyone deep down knows that we were made for justice.

[34 : 45] You're traffic, as a lawyer, you're trafficking in a commodity of justice. You're made for it to flourish. But you're redemptive. You're not when at all cost.

What you're trying to do is picture for people justice that's just breathtaking because it honors both parties as image bearers.

And you're picturing what full justice one day will be when Jesus' reign is fully established. You see, in our vocations, in our neighborhoods, we're to think of the gospel storyline to see how our spheres of influence are infused with vibrant color and rich content that reverses the curse to take people's breath away with what they know that they were made for.

When you get from seeking the common good to establishing the common ground, what I'm trying to do as I'm pursuing people's hearts, I'm trying to do gospel storyline in their lives of what they were made for, how they're weak and wounded by the fall, what redemption would look like if Jesus were to come vibrant in that area of their woundedness, and what might they look like one day fully redeemed and glorified.

And then I share my story of how God made me of how I'm weak and wounded with shame by the fall, but how Christ is redeeming, and one day those tears and that shame will be completely gone, and then I can unfold God's story of creation, fall, redemption, and the restoration of all things.

[36 : 38] Missional living is seeking to reverse the curse right where you feel it the most. Think about Jesus' embodiment of the truth of this passage.

Look at Colossians 2, 13-15. When you were dead in your transgressions and the uncircumcision of your flesh, he made you alive together with him, having forgiven us all our transgressions, having canceled out the certificate of debt, that decree, consisting of decrees against us, which was hostile to us, and he has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross.

When he had disarmed the rulers and authorities, he made a public display of them, having triumphed over them through him. What a beautiful summary of a picture of the ultimate fulfillment of the Esther story.

You have, in essence, an overwhelmed, weeping, and pleading son, who gave his very life to reverse the curse so that you and I might be invited to the party.

What do you think with me as we think about the richness of Christ embodying this, of what this might mean for us? What's the ring, the station, and life that God has given you?

[38 : 08] right where you are, not signing up for one more thing in an already overstuffed life. What's the stamp of glory and the position in life he's given you in which you're called to bring about shalom in the place of shame?

What's the ring? What's the place? What's the place of honor and position that God is burdening your heart with the most? Second, what's your plea?

How is the shame of the fall pressing in? Like if you're in survival young mom mode, it just might mean you think you're going to go crazy if you don't have a play group.

That would count. The weak and woundedness of the fall and the station in life you're in. Maybe there's an injustice at work. Maybe there's a need in your neighborhood.

Maybe there's lack of community in your neighborhood or in your kid's school. What is a need that would give you great joy to move towards it? You know what Frederick Buechner called call?

[39 : 14] It's where your greatest joy and culture's greatest need meet. I think you could also say it. Call is where your greatest wounds and culture's your sphere of influence greatest need kiss.

It's not different than that. It's right in that place. And then what's the decree? How can the decree of God's good news, the decree of the gospel, go at work in that particular sphere of influence that you're in to reverse the curse?

What needs reversing? What if I approached it and brought life, would put defenses down so that we could hear one another and take someone else's breath away as that need was met, both in my life and those I'm trying to serve?

And then finally, have a party. Invite others in to the beauty and the wonder of reversing the curse because when we move to reverse the curse, right where we feel it the most, others want to enter in.

Missional living is reversing the curse where you feel life's hardness pressing most in.

[40 : 41] Let me pray that this story would become true of us as well. Would you join me? Spirit of God, at the beginning, I ask that you would connect the dots.

Would you? Would you move the story? Would you move the conceptual things that I argued for? Not just to stay there, but would you cause them to intersect where we live?

Would you help us see just the relational spheres in which we're already engaged and yet we're experiencing great need? Would you give us ridiculous spirit-led creativity to move towards those simple needs in ways that reverse the curse and take the breath away of us as we do it and those to whom we do it so that many others can be invited to the party where they can know the restoration that's only found in the gospel story?

Would you continue to grow and nurture Southwood Prez to be a people who do life missionally? Not just absorbed in themselves, but on the move.

Not just overwhelmed, but diving into the midst of the things that overwhelm others too, so that gospel hope might dawn and shalom might be known in Huntsville.

[42 : 11] We pray this in Jesus, King Jesus' powerful name. Amen. For more information, visit us online at southwood.org.