Living as Exiles on Mission: Showing God's Goodness

(1 Pe. 2:9-3:7)

Introduction

The Christian identity as "exiles on mission" in a complex, fast-changing world is not new. The Epistle of Mathetes to Diognetus, written around AD 130 during a time of intense persecution, offers a vivid description of our spiritual ancestors:

"Christians are not distinguished from the rest of mankind by either country, speech, or customs … They reside in their respective countries, but only as aliens. They take part in everything as citizens and put up with everything as foreigners. Every foreign land is their home, and every home a foreign land … They spend their days on earth, but hold citizenship in heaven."

That was written to a Roman, anti-Christian world of many languages and gods. It could have been written for us because Cornerstone is like a microcosm of Markham-Stouffville today:

- 82.1% of Markham residents identify as a visible minority,
- 58% were born outside Canada,
- 40.8% of our neighbours say they have no religion at all.
- Stouffville, once a small town, is changing fast. Today about 16% Chinese, 15% South Asian, and growing Filipino, Black, and Middle Eastern populations.

What was once homogenous is now a microcosm of the world. God has brought the nations to cross our streets, share our fences, and sit in our classrooms and churches/places of worship.

The question is no longer "Do we have a mission field?"

The question is, "Will we see the mission field God already put on our doorstep?"

Today's message, **Living as Exiles on Mission: Showing God's Goodness,** is a reminder of our individual and corporate identity and life purpose. It is a calling to notice and share the overwhelming goodness of God right where we live, work, and play.

Lesson 1:

We don't need to cross an ocean to be missionaries. If we are not a mission field, we are missionaries.

"But you are **a chosen people**. You are **royal priests, a holy nation, God's very own possession**. As a result, **you can show others the goodness of God**, for he called you out of the darkness into his wonderful light. Once you had no identity as a people; now you are God's people. Once you received no mercy; now you have received God's mercy." (1 Pe. 2:9-10 NLT)

Peter is quoting what God said to Moses:

"You yourselves have seen what I did to Egypt, and how I carried you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself. Now if you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all nations **you will be my treasured possession... you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation**." (Ex. 19:4-6 NLT) [1]

Rodney Stark, the American social scientist, comments on the dramatic expansion of the church during the first centuries and notes the powerful influence of this grassroots movement of ordinary folks – no superheroes - doing life in Jesus' name.[2]

God's chosen people were not redeemed for their own isolated benefit. They were not called to form a sectarian ghetto.

We are called to be a gospel-shaped community, actively overcoming our human instincts to "huddle and cuddle."

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[1] Cf. I provide water in the wilderness and streams in the wasteland, to give drink to *my people, my chosen, [21]the people I formed for myself that they may proclaim my praise*. (Is. 43:20-21 NIV)

[2] cf. Chester & Timmis, *Everyday Church*, p. 108.

Cornerstone, we are a royal priesthood and that means two complementary responsibilities:

We bring God to people. In Markham-Stouffville, many of our neighbours grew up with …

- Confucian values of filial piety,
- Hindu ideas of dharma and karma,
- Sikh seva (selfless service),
- Muslim devotion to prayer,
- Canadian skepticism that says “all religions are equally valid.”
- Secular atheism that denies God’s existence.

We cannot show God’s goodness with a one-size-fits-all tract. We must do life with our neighbours:

we listen, remember names, learn their stories, eat together - with truth and grace, hospitality and generosity, sacrifice and service, hope and healing.

We bring people to God. A priest does not make people like him; he makes God known.

The early defenders of the faith in the second and third centuries considered themselves a "third race” or “third way"—neither Jew nor Gentile—who used their freedom to do good.

Again in the Epistle to Diognetus, the writer, Mathetes, explains the purpose of Christians in society with this striking analogy:

What the soul is to the body, Christians are to the world.

Tom Holland, a world renown historian, argues in his book, *Dominion: How the Christian Revolution Remade the World*, that Christianity helped transformed a dehumanizing world in which infanticide as common, slavery was taken for granted, the weak existed for the benefit of the strong.

- I have an Iranian hairdresser with a Scottish husband whose young son asked different bible questions, received two bibles from Cornerstone, was baptized last Easter, and continues asking tough faith questions.

We would love to hear your stories! You can go to the Joining God webpage. (https://cornerstonechurch.ca/joining-god-in-the-neighbourhood/) and can click the Share Your Story button to fill out the form.

Lesson 2:

Mission is my schedule.

"Dear friends, I urge you … to abstain from sinful desires, which wage war against your soul. **Live such good lives** among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your **good deeds and glorify God** on the day he visits us … For it is God's will that by **doing good**

Peter then shows us where that reordering happens. 2:11-12 is the headline of Peter's following instructions about how and where "good works" are to be manifested, as people growing toward spiritual maturity and reflecting outwardly God's inner character and community transforming work.

1. **Good Citizens in Society: Practice Civic Kindness Across Cultures (1 Pe. 2:13-17)**

   We show the goodness of God by breaking out of our comfort zones to practice radical, Christ-like civic kindness. In a city where 40% have no religious affiliation and many come from different countries, we do this when we …

   - Care for local parks and trails,
   - Build bridges between diaspora communities (e.g., new comers welcome

dinners, getting involved in Markham's Diversity Action Plan),

- Serve our Food Pantry with dignity and culturally appropriate foods.
- Continue to develop Cornerstone Centre to serve as a hub of connection and belonging for the wider community, acting as a welcoming space where isolated neighbors can find genuine relationship.

2. **Good Employees at Work: Be "Employee of the Month" everyday (1 Pe. 2:18-25)**

   Peter addresses servants in the ancient workplace, instructing them to model a respectful presence, even under difficult management. In our offices, schools, and corporate spaces, you are an ambassador.

   When you choose integrity over cutting corners, treat a difficult supervisor with respect, or encourage a stressed co-worker, you demonstrate a different way of being human.

3. **Good Spouses at Home: Bring out the best in Each Other (1 Pe. 3:1-7)**

   The mission moves across the threshold of the home. Husbands and wives are challenged to build relationships marked by mutual honor, deep respect, and gentle spirits.

   Our homes are our most immediate neighborhoods. When our households are spaces of safety, honor, and grace, they become a bright beacon of God's goodness to a lonely, fragmented suburban culture.

Conclusion

We live in a contemporary culture that is deeply skeptical of religious faith. A 2026 study by Lifeway reveals that

- **63% of Canadians believe God accepts worship from all religions.**
- **54% view the Bible as a collection of ancient myths.**

- **41% believe God is unconcerned with day-to-day decisions.**
- **Only 28% agree "Every Christian has an obligation to join a local church."**

Our non-believing family members, coworkers, and neighbors are not outreach projects, targets for tracts, or stats for church growth.

They are people made in the image of God, individuals to love and be loved, many carrying stories of immigration loss, academic pressure, family separation, and the search for belonging.

Today, as Joshua D Chatraw says in *Telling a Better Story: How to Talk About God in a Skeptical Age*,

we need "a way to winsomely communicate the gospel to people shaped by a culture that is in desperate need of hope, yet skeptical of religious faith."[3]

Our "apology"/defence of faith is a gospel-shaped witnessing and our strategy in this skeptical culture is simple:

Create curiosity by living out "shalom" under Jesus' leadership.

We have three simple tools today to help us walk this out together:

First, use the tools to deepen your discipleship. **Pick up a physical copy of the 40-Day Joining God in the Neighbourhood Workbook** at the Welcome Desk, or access it online at **cornerstonechurch.ca/joiningGod**. Use these daily steps to pause, pray, and notice God's goodness.

Second, **map your focus to help us build bridges and join God in the neighborhood.** Go to the webpage and fill out the quick commitment form to let us know the specific

[3] Joshua D Chatraw, *Telling a Better Story: How to Talk About God in a Skeptical Age*, p. 8.

neighborhood, workplace, or school where you are choosing to pay attention. When hundreds of us pin our focus areas, we will see a beautiful corporate picture of our collective footprint across York Region.

“What the soul is to the body, Cornerstone is to our city.”

Third, **practice one bridge-building act this week.**

- Host a hot-pot potluck and invite the family who speaks another language.
- Bring a culturally thoughtful dish to a neighbour.
- Offer to drive a newcomer to a Service Canada appointment.
- Learn timely truths from younger generations; soak in timeless wisdom from seasoned seniors.
- Pray daily for two neighbours by name in their heart language, if you know it.

Imagine …..

Let’s be the kind of church where the present day Diognetus in Markham and Stouffville can say,