

Living Stones in a Spiritual Temple

Popcorn duty. Really?" Briana thought. She was one of very few public school teachers at church. And she was stuck on popcorn duty?

Her church was having its annual back to school giveaway. The church was giving away book bags, pens, pencils, notebooks, and other supplies.

"I think this is going to be our largest back to school event yet," Shanice had said. "I know we are going to touch souls for the kingdom!"

Pastor had made Shanice, a school administrator, the chair of the "Back-to-School Committee." But Briana was an educator too, and she felt her expertise was not being considered for this event.

"I really appreciate your church doing this," the woman said to Briana, as she took a bag of popcorn. "I have three kids, and this will really help stretch my salary."

"I'm glad," Briana said, and smiled. What had she been thinking? She was helping her church be a light for its community.

"We would love for you to visit us," said Briana.

"I think I will," said the woman. "Do you have Sunday school? I have two elementary-aged children and a junior high schooler."

"Yes," said Briana. "I am one of the elementary Sunday school teachers. What are your children's names?"

1. *How do you see yourself? In a three-minute "elevator pitch" describe yourself to a stranger.*

2. *Scripture describes believers as a royal priesthood, set apart from the world. What does this make you think about?*

3. *What do you want to be known for?*

God's Living Cornerstone

1 Peter 2:1–8 KJV

1 Wherefore laying aside all malice, and all guile, and hypocrisies, and envies, and all evil speakings, 2 As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby: 3 If so be ye have tasted that the Lord is gracious.

4 To whom coming, as unto a living stone, disallowed indeed of men, but chosen of God, and precious, 5 Ye also, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ. 6 Wherefore also it is contained in the scripture, behold, I lay in Sion a chief corner stone, elect, precious: and he that believeth on him shall not be confounded. 7 Unto you therefore which believe he is precious: but unto them which be disobedient, the stone which the builders disallowed, the same is made the head of the corner, 8 And a stone of stumbling, and a rock of offence, even to them which stumble at the word, being disobedient:

1 Peter 2:1–8 NIV

¹ Therefore, rid yourselves of all malice and all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and slander of every kind. ² Like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation, ³ now that you have tasted that the Lord is good.

⁴ As you come to him, the living Stone—rejected by humans but chosen by God and precious to him— ⁵ you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. ⁶ For in Scripture it says:

“See, I lay a stone in Zion,
a chosen and precious
cornerstone,

and the one who trusts in him
will never be put to shame.”

⁷ Now to you who believe, this stone is precious. But to those who do not believe,

“The stone the builders
rejected
has become the cornerstone,”

⁸ and,

“A stone that causes people to
stumble
and a rock that makes them
fall.”

They stumble because they

whereunto also they were appointed.

disobey the message—which is also what they were destined for.

Peter says that Christians should “be holy” because God is “holy” (1 Peter 1:15). This section expands on that idea, directing Peter’s audience on how to live a holy life. Holy people who are “born again” must love each other deeply and show love in their actions (1 Peter 1:23). They show no malice, deceit, hypocrisy, envy, or slander toward anyone. Just as babies “grow up” on milk, believers mature in God’s “salvation” through the Word. We only have to “taste” God’s goodness to know that we want more (v. 3).

Peter switches metaphors: believers—like stones—are building a “spiritual house” around the cornerstone (v. 5). When building a structure, the cornerstone ties the first two walls together and directs how the rest of the building will be constructed. It must be perfectly straight and level and is part of the building’s foundation. Jesus is God’s chosen and “living” cornerstone on which His holy house will be constructed (v. 4). But tragically, Jesus is a stone that people rejected when they did not accept Him as God’s Messiah. This house is like a temple where believers, the “living stones,” bring offerings to Christ, the living cornerstone (v. 5). As one building, believers are unified in God’s house and rest on the Lord.

Peter quotes two Old Testament verses on “stones.” These texts might have been widely seen as referring to the Messiah, and Jesus fulfills them. Isaiah 28:16 calls the Messiah the “chosen and precious cornerstone” (v. 6) in whom we can put our complete “trust.” Psalm 118:22 describes people’s rejection of the Messiah as cornerstone. Jesus Himself quoted this verse to describe His rejection (see Matt. 21:42; Mark 12:10; Luke 20:17), and Peter quotes the verse in his speech at Pentecost (Acts 4:11).

For those who believe in Him, Jesus is the solid rock on which to build faith. Jesus is “a stone of stumbling” for the disobedient (1 Peter 2:8 KJV; see Isa. 8:14), for they have rejected the source of life and redemption.

4. *What kind of spiritual nourishment do believers need? Why?*

5. *How are believers like a temple built with Jesus as the cornerstone?*

6. *What does it look like when people reject Jesus?*

God's Special Possession

1 Peter 2:9–12 KJV

9 But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light: 10 Which in time past were not a people, but are now the people of God: which had not obtained mercy, but now have obtained mercy.

11 Dearly beloved, I beseech you as strangers and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul; 12 Having your conversation honest among the Gentiles: that, whereas they speak against you as evildoers, they may by your good works, which they shall behold, glorify God in the day of visitation.

1 Peter 2:9–12 NIV

⁹ But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. ¹⁰ Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.

¹¹ Dear friends, I urge you, as foreigners and exiles, to abstain from sinful desires, which wage war against your soul. ¹² 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.

Peter alludes to Exodus 19 for three descriptions of Christ's followers. They are "a royal priesthood" and "God's special possession" (v. 9), descriptions God used at Mount Sinai for the children of Israel. In that much earlier context, God identifies His people as those who "obey me fully

and keep my covenant" (Ex. 19:5). But in the new covenant context, this identity has shifted to center around those in Christ, who collectively "have received mercy" (1 Peter 2:10). Jews and Gentiles are now part of the family of faith.

The priesthood of believers in this context means something similar to the way that Israelites were called to be priests in relation to the nations (again, Ex. 19:5–6). Priests minister in the presence of God and convey collective worship. They are held to a high standard of behavior, since they are seen by others. Therefore, believers should "declare the praises of him who has called us out of darkness into his wonderful light" (1 Peter 2:9). Believers must live such godly lives that the world "may see [their] good deeds and glorify God" (v. 12).

Peter then alludes to the redemption of Hosea's unfaithful wife. Through Hosea, God told the Israelites that He would "show my love to the one I called 'Not my loved one'" and "say to those called 'Not my people,' 'You are my people'" (Hos. 2:23). Likewise, in the new covenant context under Christ, believers have been given a new identity and holy status as God's people.

Believers live as the "people of God" in exile in this world. Above all, they resist sinful desires (v. 11). Peter's audience had plenty of sinful distractions, as we continue to witness today. But Christ's followers must not be accused of hypocrisy. Believers are always at war with wrongful desires, in a battle for their very souls (v. 11). The better they fight the battle, the more their good deeds will show that living for Christ is the better way; they shall exalt and share the goodness of God, until Jesus returns (v. 12).

7. What do the Old Testament titles for God's people reveal about their identity in Christ?

8. Why should believers regard themselves as "foreigners and exiles" in this world (v. 11)?

9. What battle are believers constantly fighting?

Building a Cathedral for Christ

Most cathedrals we see today took decades to build. Some of the grander buildings even took centuries. If you've had the pleasure of visiting a cathedral, it's easy to see how it could have taken so long. The architecture is intricate and intentional with soaring ceilings, stained glass depictions of Bible stories, and statues commemorating heroes of the faith. Anyone who poured their life into the construction of a cathedral would have understood they were participating in a project they might never see completed. Rather, they were participating in something much bigger than themselves. Imagine what it must have been like to invest so much of your life into something you would never get to see finished.

While not all believers are called to build such impressive structures, Christ's followers are all called to invest their lives in God's kingdom purposes. This project is much larger than any one person. It started long before us, and we know it may continue when we are gone. My life isn't only about what happens in the span of years I live. When I think that way, I find motivation to resist sinful desires.

"Life is short" is a phrase we might use to justify short-sighted decisions. Since there is so little time, the logic goes, we might as well seek comfort and pleasure while we can. But thinking of ourselves as pilgrims invites us to consider that we are part of something larger than what we see in the here and now. Our lives are not about what pleasure and goodness we can derive from the world. We are putting our lives toward the bigger project.

10. *What are some practical ways we can shine light in the darkness?*

11. *How does seeing ourselves as pilgrims help us love others more fully?*

12. *In what ways are you tempted to make this world your home?*

A Light in the Darkness

On our own, it may feel at times like the darkness is overwhelming. But God has called those with faith in Christ to a priestly role of witness and worship. When we join together with our Christian brothers and sisters, we are like the stones of the temple who find their place in relation to others.

► *Can you name one or more people who are your partners in the task of resisting the darkness?*

► *What role of encouragement do you bring to these others? (examples: kind words, financial support, wisdom of experience)*

KEY VERSE

Ye also, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ. —1 Peter 2:5 KJV

You also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. —1 Peter 2:5 NIV

DAILY BIBLE READINGS FOR NEXT WEEK'S LESSON

Week of September 1 through September 7

(See *The Quiet Hour and Cross* for devotionals on these passages.)

Mon. Mark 1:1–8—God Sends a Messenger.

Tues. Isaiah 7:1–7—God Defends the Chosen People.

Wed. Isaiah 20:1–6—God Warns of Coming Disaster.

Thurs. Matthew 11:1–6—God Fulfills God's Promises.

Fri. Matthew 11:7–15—God Works through Unexpected Vessels.

Sat. Psalm 145:1–12—God Is Gracious and Merciful.

Sun. Isaiah 6:1–8; 38:1–5—God Strengthens Those God Calls.