

# “Staying Alive”

1 Peter 2: Select Verses

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One of the wonderful blessings of growing up on the farm was being able to work side by side with my Dad. I experienced and learned so much from my father and his deep faith. My dad is extremely patient and has always encouraged me. I still remember when I was about 5, my Dad would encourage me to help him build things. I would try to pound in a nail and miss it, then I would hit it off center and it would fly across the barn and ping against the concrete. My Dad was quick to hand me another nail and encouraged me to try again. This time I would get in a few good hits before bending the nail over. He would pull it out and encourage me to try again until I would get the nail driven in. There was always a million chores to do on the farm, but my Dad always took the extra time to encourage me.

It wasn't long before my building skills quickly improved. My first solo project was a birdhouse for my mother for Mother's Day. Dad got me the wood and tools and again encouraged me. I spent hours on that birdhouse measuring, cutting, and nailing it together. About every hour my dad would come in give me a few pointers and again encourage me. As I was putting the birdhouse together, I became frustrated and wanted to give up. My cuts were off, so nothing fit snug. Some of the nails were pounded in crooked splitting the wood on one panel and sticking out of another. My Dad came in. I told him I was going to burn it, and that we needed to buy mom something. He picked up the birdhouse and pointed out what was right with it and helped me patch it up. Then we painted it together. I gave it to mom and she loved it and hung it in a big pine tree in the yard. A bird was actually brave enough to make a nest in it.

My construction ability blossomed and after watching a construction crew put on an addition on our barn. I decided to design and build my first structure at age ten: a three-room, 10x10 foot doghouse with a floor and shingled roof all built from scrap from the barn remodel. When I was in junior high, one of our chopper box wagons tipped over. I savaged the wood and metal roof and built a 20x20 foot shack by our seven acre lake. My Dad was always encouraging me. Every time I would point to something that wasn't quite perfect he would point out the parts that were perfect and offer suggestions on how to improve. Over the years, I have built many things.

The power of community and encouragement has been well documenting. In athletics, it is called the Bislett Effect. The name comes from the Bislett Stadium in Oslo, Norway, a place where 62 track-and-field records have been broken over the years the most of any track. The reason is the encouragement of the crowd. The track is narrow, with only six lanes, and the grandstand is so steep that the fans are practically on top of the athletes. The sound of 21,000 screaming fans drives athletes to deliver their very best. The closeness of the crowd helps them excel. That's why 62 records have been broken at Bislett. We run faster in front of great crowds, because we are inspired by community.

The apostle Peter knew all about encouragement and the Bislett Effect and explains it through a construction metaphor **“like living stones, let yourselves be built into a spiritual house”**. Inspiration comes from our community with one another and Jesus.

Recently a comprehensive survey of teenagers was completed. The findings were that 4 out of 5 youth described their faith in God as very important to them. This may surprise those of you who are a parent, but the survey revealed that teenagers listen to what their parents say about God and life. According to the survey, youth that attend worship regularly and belong to a youth fellowship do better at school, feel better about themselves, shun drugs, care about the poor, and make moral choices based on what is loving rather than what would make them happy. The researchers considered variables such as the possibility that more obedient youngsters are more likely to attend church and still found that “faith and practice themselves exert significant positive, direct and indirect influences on the lives of teenagers, helping to foster healthier, more engaged adolescents who live more constructive and promising lives.”

Mark Yaconelli of youth specialties wrote, “Teens want relationship, connection to people outside of themselves...They want to feel valued and delighted by people outside of their family...They're looking for a community who will claim them. Their deepest fear is that they will shut down, that they will turn into the many

adults they see who seem to be over-stressed, friendless and passionless. The question they bring to adults, churches, schools and the universe is this: Do you know how to stay alive?"

Christian Education professor Roger Nishioka responded, "The youth survey tracks with what I have heard young adults in their 20s and 30s say. The struggle for identity is enormous. They wonder where does God fit in?"

Where does God fit in? And do you know how to stay alive? Scripture gives an answer. **1 Peter 2: Select Verses MSG "Welcome to the living stone, Jesus Christ, the source of life. Present yourselves as building stones for the construction of a sanctuary vibrant with life, in which you'll serve as holy priests offering Christ-approved lives up to God. You are the ones chosen by God, chosen for the high calling of priestly work, chosen to be a holy people, God's instruments to do God's work and speak out for God, to tell others of the night and day difference God made for you—from nothing to something, from rejected to accepted."**

Jesus is the only perfect corner stone--eternally solid and true. Jesus invites us to present ourselves as a living stone to be cemented into a great house of faith surrounded and connected to our fellow believers. A single stone has no stability it can easily be picked up and moved, but once a stone is cemented into a house built on a sure foundation it is solid and steadfast. Even fragile and odd-shaped stones cemented into a wall have great strength and stability.

The Presbyterian Church of Gates, New York was intentionally built out of clinker bricks. Clinker bricks come out of the kiln deformed and misshaped. Clinker bricks are rejects normally thrown away. That Presbyterian congregation thought they were the perfect thing to build their church. After these bricks were cemented together they made a solid and beautiful building. None of us are perfect. Most of us will admit we are at least a little odd. However, once our faith cements us to Jesus and we are cemented to one another by our encouragement, we become a wonderful community capable of achievements beyond our wildest dreams. All the powers of evil cannot prevail against the community of believers.

Our identity is a beloved child of God with a special place in the community of faith, the church. We do not fit God into our lives. Our life is fit into God. Everything that is good, wonderful and loving about us comes from our foundation, God. We are connected and encouraged by millions of believers that have come before us. We are supported and encouraged by believers that journey with us, and we will cheer us on and we will encourage believers that come after us in this great living house of faith. We stay alive by our relationships with one another and God. Our passion is to know Christ and show Christ.

Nelson Mandela spoke these words at his inauguration. "Our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate. Our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure. It is our light, not our darkness, that most frightens us. We ask ourselves, who am I to be brilliant, gorgeous, talented and fabulous? Actually, who are you not to be? You are a child of God. Your playing small doesn't serve the world. There's nothing enlightened about shrinking so that other people won't feel insecure around you. We were born to make manifest the glory of God that is within us. It's not just in some of us; it's in everyone. And as we let our own light shine, we unconsciously give other people permission to do the same. As we are liberated from our own fear, our presence automatically liberates others."

The apostle Peter wrote, **1 Peter 2: Select Verses "You are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people, in order that you may proclaim the mighty acts of God who called you out of darkness into God's marvelous light. 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."**

A father mentoring his son, athletes setting records by the Bislett Effect, youth excelling fueled by their relationships. The living stone analogy reveals our mission in the world, to see ourselves as a community built with Jesus that encourages, empowers and enables each other thereby allowing us to set all sorts of records. Enabling us to do much more than we had ever dreamed possible. Jesus is our cornerstone that keeps us anchored, strong, and secure. Jesus' love enables us to be loving. We, at times, will be runners and at other times cheerleaders: helping, assisting, empowering those who are on some particular track, some particular course, who are facing some particular challenge, obstacle, trial or test. Peter is urging us to live in harmony with one another, so we can proclaim the mighty acts of God to a hurting and hope-starved world, a God that is leading us out of darkness into God's marvelous light. Amen

