

“Living Stones”

1 Peter 2:4-6, 9-10

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Prayer for Understanding God of mercy, you promised never to break your covenant with us. Amid all the changing words of our generation, speak your eternal Word. May we respond to your gracious promises with gratitude. Amen.

Peter preached: **1 Peter 2:4-6, 9-10 NLT** “**You are coming to Christ, who is the living cornerstone of God’s temple. Jesus was rejected by people, but Jesus was chosen by God for great honor. And you are living stones that God is building into God’s spiritual temple. What is more, you are God’s holy priests. Through the mediation of Jesus Christ, you offer spiritual sacrifices that please God. As the Scriptures say, “I am placing a cornerstone in Jerusalem, chosen for great honor and anyone who trusts in God will never be disgraced.” 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 God called you out of the darkness into God’s 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.”**

Peter packs several illustrations into this dense paragraph. You are a living stone cemented with love to others forming a temple to glorify God. You are a holy priest. Holy in that grace is washing away every imperfection and enhancing your goodness. Priest in that you have direct access to God. You are a conduit through which God’s goodness, life, love, joy, and grace flow into the world. You are a holy priest blessed to offer spiritual sacrifices. Instead of animal sacrifices you are to offer loving service, share and glorify God with your life. All people are chosen by God. All people are royal priests. Royal in that we belong to God’s realm having an eternal inheritance of ever expanding love, joy, and glory. All people are becoming a holy nation, a harmonious community of peace where we affirm, build each other up, cheer for each other, and celebrate each other’s goodness. All people are God’s possession meaning God has claimed, redeemed, values, and delights in us. All of this enhances our love, so we can show each other the goodness of God journeying from darkness to wonderful light. Once, we had no identity. We were slaves to sin. Now our identity is a beloved child of God who shines glory into the cosmos. Once, we were dead. Now, God’s steadfast everlasting mercy and grace completes us, so we are able to brilliantly shine.

Whenever you face difficulties, think small, beat yourself up, are discouraged, suffering, or hopeless, remember who you are. You are a living stone, a temple for God, a holy priest, chosen, royal, and shining with God’s wonderful light.

In Gates, New York, the Presbyterian church was intentionally built of clinker bricks. Clinkers are bricks that come out of the kiln deformed and misshapen, factory seconds, rejects. Normally clinkers are thrown away. Those Presbyterians built the church with clinker bricks to remind everyone that God turns clinker bricks into living stones forming a community that shines.

Nelson Mandela said: “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 does not serve the world. There is 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 is not just in some of us; it is 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.”

Francis of Assisi explained: We are living stones of reconciliation able to embrace the whole creation.

Doug Nichols, the International Director of Action International Ministries, made the excellencies of God known in a tuberculosis sanitarium in India in 1967. Doug was a missionary with Operation Mobilization and got TB. He tried to give tracts and copies of the gospel of John away, but no one would take them. They did not like him and assumed he was a rich American. At one point for several nights, he would wake up coughing at 2 a.m. He noticed an emaciated man trying to get out of bed. The man could not stand up and began to whimper. He lay back in bed. In the morning, the stench in the ward was terrible and everyone was angry at the

man for not containing himself. The next night, the same thing happened. Doug woke up coughing with his own terrible sickness and weakness. He saw the man try again to get out of bed. Again, he could not stand and began to cry softly. Doug picked him up and carried him to the bathroom. In the morning, another patient gave Doug a steaming cup of tea. Through that whole day, people thanked him. His humble, loving service created a ripple effect of loving kindness. The sanitarium was still a dark place, but it shined with the wonderful light of God through each person's compassionate service. Each person embraced their role as a living stone designed to expand the love of the cosmos.

The Bislett Effect refers to the phenomenon where athletes achieve extraordinary, record-breaking performances due to the close proximity of the crowd at Bislett Stadium in Oslo, Norway. Known as a premier venue for track and field, the stadium's atmosphere of cheering fans creates a ripple effect of energy boosting performance.

The Bislett Effect is similar to the Living Stone Effect. An individual typically excels in loving service when they are affirmed, encouraged, and cheer for. Each individual living stone, that's us, becomes a temple glorifying God when we support each other. Together building alongside and on top of each other the temple soars. When we see ourselves as a living stone, a temple for God, a holy priest, chosen, royal, and shining with God's wonderful light and binding ourselves to one another with love we empower each other to set goodness records accomplishing far more than we dreamed possible. We are called to both do loving goodness and cheer for everyone else.

Pastor Henry Brinton more fully perceived the Living Stone Effect when he ran a marathon. Henry's T-shirt is from an organization called "25:40" which provides assistance to children in Africa striving to eliminate poverty, disease, and violence. 25:40 is a reference to the passage in Matthew in which Jesus says, "**Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.**" The marathon begins. Brinton moves slowly then picks up his pace from the energy of the frenzied fans lining the route screaming encouragement. His rhythm increases with the upbeat music. As the miles drop behind him, Henry slowed, then he thought of the many pledges that church members had made to 25:40 in connection with his run. The thought of their pledges per mile quickened his pace. He knew that each step would be translated into compassionate care for children. By mile 16, he felt leg pain, mile 20 real fatigue, this was where the images of the children, and the stories of the tremendous good his previous donations provided, helped him keep going. Whenever he felt like giving up, he thought of their perseverance. Whenever he was about to quit, he thought of the enduring good a few more miles of money would generate. He finished by focusing on the way his run will bring others into God's wonderful light. Henry supported by his congregation and a cheering crowd, succeeded in raising \$5,000 to help children. Together, they knew that whenever we help our siblings, we are helping Jesus. They discovered that we are at our most majestic when we work for the good of all people. The Living Stone Effect made Henry, pledgers, the crowd, and children all winners of love. Henry achieved what he did because he did not run alone, instead, he was part of a chosen, royal, holy people, striving to shine God's wonderful light.

Celtic spirituality believes in sacred flow. God is a river flowing through the earth and everything that has being. This sacred river runs through you, me, and everyone. When we open ourselves to the sacred flow we become more fully alive. Open to a deep flow of feeling. When we weep, something in the salt sea of life's origins stir in us. We are awakening to a flow at the heart of our being. Tears can cleanse our sight and wash the lens of our heart so we can see God in the earth, feel the current of life, and be propelled on a transformational journey toward wholeness. Every task, no matter how small, from washing dishes to walking the land, is a sacred act that connects us to the flow of life. John Scotus Eriugena "sees divine light in everyone, even Satan. All of our light that has been denied, covered, or distorted will shine again. The darkness of Satan will never extinguish the light God has created in Satan. Satan will shine again. God's grace is ultimately irresistible. We are to awaken to our identity and nature which is light. All will shine again."

A Celtic Prayer

I bind to myself today to the energy of the stars, the brilliance of the sun, the whiteness of the moon, the splendor of fire, the flashing of lightning, the wildness of wind, the depth of seas, the lushness of earth, the solidity of rocks. Awake, o my soul, to the flow of God deep within you. Awake to the sacred flow in every creature and in every person. The sacred flow is our river of resurrection, the promise of new beginnings. Awake o my Soul to the flow of God deep within you. Awake o my soul. Awake.

One of the joys of workcamp is see people shine with God's wonderful light. Initially, most are timid, unsure, hesitant to serve and reluctant to share. We cheer for each other. Praise God through upbeat songs. We teach, encourage, and affirm each other. We share God sightings. By the end of the week, youth are confident in their home improvement skills. Many have expanded their gratitude for their giftedness and the giftedness of others. Most have become courageous in acts of loving service. Together, we are more perceptive in seeing God and bold in sharing God sightings. Our singing is robust. Hundreds of homes are repaired. Hundreds of residents have their hope expanded and are savoring the love they have received. A community is an awe of the tremendous impact a group of teenagers provided when they were encouraged.

When have you been inspired to greatness by encouragement? Who will you encourage? How will you encourage them?

Listen again to Peter's sermon: **"You are God's people and have received God's mercy. You are living stones that God is building into God's spiritual temple. You are God's holy priests. You offer spiritual sacrifices that please God. 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 God called you out of the darkness into God's wonderful light."** Amen

