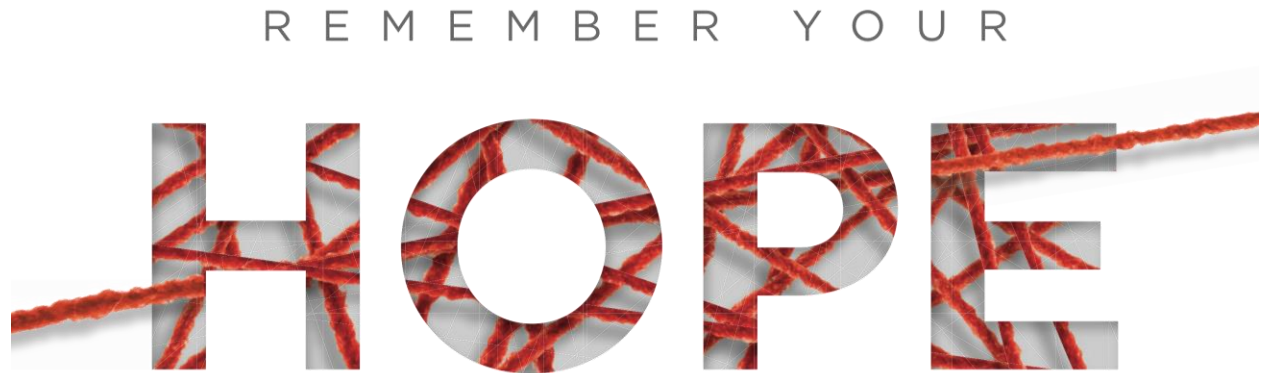


Lesson 3: 1 Peter 2:4–12

Hook



Main Point: When we live holy lives, we are living stones in His temple.

LEGO® traces its history to 1932 when a master carpenter in Denmark established the business.ⁱ In 1949, the forerunner of the LEGO bricks we know today was produced, and in 2014 LEGO became the world's most profitable toy company.ⁱⁱ More than 485 billion pieces of LEGO have been manufactured as of January 2018.ⁱⁱⁱ The world's tallest LEGO tower employed 550,000 bricks, stretching 114 feet, 11 inches in the sky. The tower was constructed in Milan Italy and took 5 days to construct.^{iv}

Teacher: Break your Bible Fellowship into small groups and provide them with LEGO bricks (or any brand of toy building blocks). Give the groups two minutes to construct a tower. Each tower must remain upright without assistance for 30 seconds upon completion. The tallest tower wins.

Q: What did you find challenging in constructing your tower? What would have made the work easier?

Q: What is necessary if you desire to construct something that will last?

Q: How did Christ build the Church? What makes the Church strong? How is this unique from any other organization in history?

Book

Main Point: When we live holy lives, we are living stones in His temple.

Text Summary: We are God's temple together as the body of Christ. None of us is in this alone; we each have our own part to play in the mission of building God's kingdom, but we all fit together and build upon each other to build God's temple. Christ is the cornerstone, our foundation, the plumb line of our faith, and the rock that holds us all together. As living stones of God's temple, our lives bring glory to God's name.

1 Peter 2:4–5 [Read]

Talking Point 1: As living stones, we offer spiritual sacrifices with our lives.

Q: Why does Peter stress that living stones are rejected by men but chosen by God?

Q: How does it make you feel to be called a stone in God's building?

Q: How does the concept of the "holy priesthood" connect believers to the Old Testament?

In the Old Testament, the temple was the "house" of God, a building where God's Spirit dwelled, in the Holy of Holies on the mercy seat of the ark of the covenant. This was the great promise of the covenant, that God would dwell with His people and be their God (Genesis 17:7; Exodus 6:7; Ezekiel 36:28, et. al.). While Israel wandered in the desert, they had the tabernacle, a tent that functioned as a portable temple that could be moved wherever the nation of Israel went. But God promised that when they entered the land, they would build a permanent house for God's presence to dwell. This was how they would know they had finally conquered the land, when they were able to build a permanent stone building.

This promise was not fulfilled until Solomon's day, about 500 years after the Exodus. And a little more than 350 years later, the temple was destroyed by the Babylonians. When they returned from the Exile after 70 years, they started rebuilding it, but it was never restored to its former glory. About 20 years before Christ, King Herod rebuilt the temple on a more magnificent scale, to the same dimensions it had been during the days of Solomon.^v

For first-century Jews, part of the hope of the Messiah was that He would restore the temple to its former glory and God would dwell with them forever.^{vi} But when Jesus came, He redefined the temple as His body, because God's Spirit dwelled fully in Him (John 2:18–22). The Bible makes it clear that, after the Resurrection, the new temple of the Holy Spirit isn't a tent or a stone building, but the people of the Church. God's Spirit dwells in each of us individually and together we make up the body of Christ, the Church, the temple of the Holy Spirit. Each one of

us is a “living stone” laid on the foundation of Christ, each contributing our own life’s work to building the house of God (1 Corinthians 3:16–17; 1 Peter 2:4–5). Instead of offering animal sacrifices as they did in the temple of the Old Testament, we offer our whole lives as our spiritual sacrifices (v. 5; Romans 12:1–2).

We see an illustration of this truth when we look at the building of great Gothic cathedrals. Most of those cathedrals took about a hundred years to build and used so many different laborers, it sometimes took a whole town to build them. The workers spent their whole lives working on just one small part of the cathedral, and most never saw it finished. Some of them did amazing or beautiful parts like the stained-glass windows, and some literally just put one block on top of the other, day after day after day. And it wasn’t easy or fast work, either. They had to carve the natural stone into blocks, then lift each 150-pound block into place, sometimes up several stories. So, a mason might work his entire life and only build one part of one wall. With no credit, these workers made great sacrifices but were fueled by the idea of contributing to something much bigger than themselves for the glory of God.^{vii} There is a legend of a rich man who came to visit a cathedral while it was being built. He saw a worker carving a tiny bird on the inside of a beam and asked him, “Why are you spending all of that time carving something no one will ever even see?” The worker replied, “Because God sees.”^{viii}

God’s Church is like a grand cathedral. It is taking generations and generations—thousands of years—to build. We don’t know when it will be finished; only God does. Each of us is given just one little part to build. The work may be exciting or challenging, but each of us is called to build our own little part of the Church to the best of our ability, to God’s glory, because God sees. It is His building, His house. He is the grand architect; we are just the laborers. We only know what He has told us to do, our part of the job. We may never see the finished product; we may never see the fruit of our labors. We may even be on the part of the wall that keeps collapsing and have to rebuild it over and over again. But we have to trust the Architect and be faithful to our small part of the job.

Peter encouraged his readers that though they were “rejected by men” they were chosen by God and precious to Him (1 Peter 2:4). The metaphor comes from the ancient building process of carefully choosing stones for construction. At the time, when masons were building, stones weren’t all made perfectly in a factory the way they are today. They had to individually select the stone that best fit in each spot. Sometimes a stone was so unusable that they would throw it out altogether.^{ix} Remember the historical context of the letter. Peter was writing to believers who were being persecuted for their faith, encouraging them that this persecution put them in good company. Jesus was also rejected by men but “chosen” by and “precious” to God (v. 6). Peter intentionally described believers using the same language Isaiah had used for Jesus (v. 4). Jesus promised at the Last Supper that the world would hate them as it hated Him (John 15:18).

He told them in the Beatitudes that those who were persecuted, insulted, and slandered because of Him were blessed by God (Matthew 5:11). This is another way Peter reminded them to keep their hope in the midst of persecution. Though you are rejected and persecuted now, realize that God is building a new and perfect kingdom. And your life is part of the Church He is building.

Peter reminded them that their lives were spiritual sacrifices to God (1 Peter 2:5). The new covenant is not about bringing animal sacrifices to the temple. Jesus accomplished the sacrifice for sin once for all (Hebrews 9–10). Now we offer our lives as *living* sacrifices to Him (Romans 12:1–2). Some of these Christians may have been facing the reality of dying as a martyr, literally sacrificing their lives for their faith. Whether we face that possibility or not, we are called to sacrifice our lives for Jesus, to give it up to Him. When you become a believer, your life is no longer your own; it belongs to God (1 Corinthians 6:19–20). All we are and all we have are to be offered to Him, used for His glory (Colossians 3:17). As Paul wrote to the Romans, “For if we live, we live to the Lord, and if we die, we die to the Lord. So then, whether we live or whether we die, we are the Lord’s” (Romans 14:8). This is the new temple, the new priesthood, and the new sacrificial system of the new covenant (1 Peter 2:5).

Q: Share an example of one way you can offer your life to God as a living sacrifice.

Q: Why is it important to remember that we all make up God’s temple, the body of Christ, *together*? That each of us is just one stone in God’s building?

Q: When you feel rejected by the world, how can you remember your hope in your status with God?

Q: What part will you play in building God’s “Big C” Church? How can your one small life uniquely contribute to building God’s kingdom?

1 Peter 2:6–8 [Read]

Talking Point 2: As living stones of God’s temple, Jesus is our cornerstone.

Q: How does Peter describe the difference between how believers and unbelievers see Jesus?

Q: What does Isaiah promise to those who believe in Jesus?

In these two verses, Peter chose three different Old Testament quotes that connect to the metaphor of Christ as a stone and drew them together to make his point. The first quote (v. 6) is from Isaiah 28:16, the second (v. 7) is Psalm 118:22, and the third (v. 8) is Isaiah 8:14. The two Isaiah passages are the same ones Paul highlighted in Romans 9:33, when he made a contrast between believers and unbelievers.

First, Peter established that Jesus is the cornerstone about which Isaiah prophesied (v. 6). Isaiah preached to Judah, warning them that if they didn't repent and turn back to God, they would be conquered by a foreign power and taken into exile. The northern kingdom (Israel) fell to Assyria in the middle of Isaiah's time (722 B.C.), but he warned the southern kingdom (Judah) that it would happen to them, too (586 B.C.), except that they would fall to Babylon. Isaiah went back and forth between warning them and prophesying about the hope of the future Messiah. This prophecy about the cornerstone is right in the middle of a section of warnings (Isaiah 28–32), because God never delivers a message of judgment without a message of hope.

God promised that He has laid a solid foundation in Zion (1 Peter 2:6). A cornerstone could be the stone holding two walls together at the corner, but it could also serve as the foundation stone.^x The cornerstone had to fit perfectly to hold the walls together, and if the foundation stone wasn't laid just right, the wall would get more and more out of square with each new block laid on top of it. This is a reference to the hope we mentioned above, that God would rebuild the temple. In Isaiah and Psalms, Zion is a reference not just to Jerusalem, but to the Temple Mount.^{xi}

Former Anglican bishop and author N. T. Wright notes the similarity between the Hebrew word for stone (*eben*) and the word for son (*ben*) and sees this whole metaphor as a play on words. God promised David that his *son* would build the temple in Jerusalem and that he would rule forever (2 Samuel 7:12–14). That promise had an immediate fulfillment in David's son, Solomon, who built the first temple. But it found its ultimate fulfillment in the son of David who rules forever over a kingdom that is not of this world. The cornerstone God promised is not a stone at all, but a person—the Son of God. And the temple isn't a building at all, but a group of people—the Church.^{xii} The religious people of Jesus' day rejected Jesus because He didn't fit their image of Messiah. But that's because they were trying to build the wrong kind of temple.

After Peter established Jesus as this promised cornerstone, he used that stone metaphor to explain the difference between how believers and unbelievers react to Jesus (1 Peter 2:7–8). For those who believe, Jesus is their cornerstone, their foundation, the Rock on which their whole life is built (Matthew 7:24–27). But for unbelievers, He is a stumbling block, a rock of offense (1 Peter 2:8). This is similar to what Paul wrote to the Corinthians, that believers are an aroma of life to those who are living, but an aroma of death to those who are dying (2 Corinthians 2:16). Or that the Gospel is foolishness to those who are dying but the power of God to those who are being saved (1 Corinthians 1:18). Peter was explaining to the persecuted believers that those who were persecuting them just didn't get it. They didn't see who Jesus really is. The eyes of their hearts had not been opened.

The difference is whether they obey the words of Jesus (1 Peter 2:8). Just as Jesus said at the end of the Sermon on the Mount, those who hear His words and *do* them are like a man who

built his house on rock, on a firm foundation (Matthew 7:24–27). Those who stumble are those who disobey the word (1 Peter 2:8). There is a clear distinction between you and them, and you get the better end of the deal. It may not seem like it now, but in the long term, your house is the one that will stand, because it was built on the Rock. Though you may be suffering now, anyone who believes in Jesus, anyone who builds their life on Him as their cornerstone, anyone who contributes a “living stone” to the building of the Church will not be put to shame (1 Peter 2:6), but will be lifted up in the kingdom which is to come (James 4:10).^{xiii} Peter encouraged them to look forward in hope.

Q: Describe what a life built on the foundation of Jesus would look like.

Q: How do you handle talking to friends who find Jesus offensive or who don’t understand who Jesus really is?

Q: What differences can it make in our church if we always remember that Christ is our foundation and we are all just stones built on that foundation?

1 Peter 2:9–12 [Read]

Talking Point 3: As living stones, our lives reflect God’s image to the world.

Q: What is our purpose as God’s chosen people? What benefit do we receive from being God’s chosen people?

Q: What do our good deeds accomplish?

Peter returned to his first point, that the Church is the spiritual house of God and His holy priesthood (v. 5). Except this time, Peter pulled out several Old Testament titles for Israel:

- chosen people (Deuteronomy 10:15)
- royal priesthood (Exodus 19:6)
- holy nation (Exodus 19:6; Deuteronomy 7:6)
- a people of his treasured possession (Exodus 19:5; Deuteronomy 7:6)

All of these titles point back to the original covenant made with Israel, recorded in Exodus and Deuteronomy. They were called to be God’s chosen people who would bear His image to the world. God chose them not just for their own blessing, but so that He could bless the whole world through them (Genesis 12:2–3). They were to be a kingdom of priests to the rest of the world, to show the world who God is and to bring them into relationship with Him. They were to be a holy nation, set apart for Him, following His law rather than the laws of the nations around them. They were to be so different that when the surrounding nations saw how good and righteous their laws were and how much they loved one another, they would say, “What

great nation is there that has a god so near to it as the Lord.... And what great nation is there, that has statutes and rules so righteous as all this law?" (Deuteronomy 4:7–8). They were His people; they belonged to Him. Their identity was found in being His people, in being His children, being part of His family.^{xiv}

Peter connects the New Testament believers to these Old Testament promises. God ripped off branches from Israel that were not bearing fruit and grafted in new branches from the Gentiles (Romans 11:11–31). In the new covenant, believers are sons of Abraham through faith and heirs to His promises (Galatians 3:29). But that blessing comes with a responsibility. They are blessed to be a blessing to the rest of the world. Now that their identity was in Christ, they had a calling, a mission. They are a people of His own possession "so that" they may proclaim His excellencies to the world. A "so that" in Scripture always gives a purpose. They had been called out of darkness into His marvelous light (1 Peter 2:9) *so that* they can tell others about it. The Gospel is a pay-it-forward kind of thing.

They had been brought into the light, shown mercy, and given a new identity as the people of God (1 Peter 2:9–10). Peter took these words, again, from the Old Testament, this time from the prophet Hosea. He used these three stark contrasts to show just how much their identity had changed. They had gone from darkness to light—their lives were the complete opposite of what they were. This is what Christ does to us and in us. He flips our world upside-down. Or should we say right-side up? The negatives are all in the "before" list. They were in darkness, they were not a people, they did not receive mercy. The "after Jesus" column has all the good things. It is a 180-degree change for the better. Before, they were stumbling around in the darkness; now they walked in the light with their feet on the firm foundation of Jesus Christ.

Their mission was to proclaim the goodness of this light to those who are still living in darkness (2:9). Both by their words and by their actions (v. 12). Peter reminded them they were sojourners in this land. Their citizenship was in heaven, they were just passing through here. They could look forward to their eternal home in heaven. But while they were here, while they were in exile on this earth, Peter urged them to live godly lives as a light to the Gentiles, those who don't know Jesus (v. 12). While they were here, they should make the most of it, living on mission for the Gospel.

Peter had established that unbelievers stumble because they disobey the word (2:8), but believers can be an example to unbelievers when they obey God's Word (11–12). When they lived a life that is honorable and good and pure and right, people around them would notice, and it would bring glory to God (v. 12, Matthew 5:16). God told the Israelites in the Old Testament what still applies to us today. If we obey God's law; and in the New Testament, if we love each other as Jesus loved us, in humility and service, and if we live in unity together as a Church despite our differences, we will be a shining example of God's love to the world. In a

world full of chaos and discord and selfishness, peace and love and humility will shine brightly. When we live with kingdom-of-God values while on this earth, people will take notice. In the same way people took notice when Daniel and his friends lived faithfully to God while in exile. We are living in exile now. This place is not our home. Let's let our lights shine!

Q: In what ways do you need to focus more on fulfilling your mission to proclaim His excellencies, both in word and in deed? How do you need to do better about letting your light shine?

Q: How can our church be a light to unbelievers in our community? How can we live and love one another in a way that will make people take notice?

Took

Main Point: When we live holy lives, we are living stones in His temple.

The LEGO System in Play is one of the company's keys to success. Godtfred Kirk Christiansen, son of LEGO founder, developed the philosophy, and described it this way:

The LEGO System means that: all elements fit together, can be used in multiple ways, can be built together. This means that bricks bought years ago will fit perfectly with bricks bought in the future.... It means that a LEGO element not only has instant value, but will keep its value always.... We will always make sure that all bricks—from yesterday, today and tomorrow—fit together.^{xv}

This system launched in 1955 and is still in use today. LEGO bricks, though unique, fit together to build something greater.

Q: What similarities do you see in this system and the way that Jesus builds His Church?

Q: What makes the Church special?

CHALLENGES

THINK: *My whole life is just one living stone in the building of God's house.* How does this thinking keep you humble? How does it put your life into perspective? How does it give you a different or renewed sense of purpose? What part can you play in building God's Church? How does He want to use your life to build His kingdom?

PRAY: *For God's Spirit to work through you.* If we are the temple of the Holy Spirit, it is God's Spirit who does the work in us. Pray for the Spirit *in* you to grow you to be more like Jesus. But also pray for the Spirit to work *through* you, to use you as His vessel for His mission in the world.

ACT: *Proclaim His excellencies.* Choose one way you can proclaim how awesome God is and all He has done for you to the world. It may be something public, such as sharing your testimony with a friend. It may be something big but private, maybe writing a praise song. It may be sharing something powerful from your morning devotions with someone or posting something to social media. In whatever way you feel led, proclaim God's excellencies in at least one tangible way this week.

ⁱ <https://www.lego.com/en-us/aboutus/lego-group/the-lego-group-history/>

ⁱⁱ <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/smart-news/lego-biggest-toy-company-world-1-180952611/>

ⁱⁱⁱ <https://entertainment.howstuffworks.com/todays-legos-are-more-than-just-toys.htm>

-
- ^{iv} <https://www.guinnessworldrecords.com/world-records/tallest-structure-built-with-interlocking-plastic-bricks>
- ^v Gordon Fee and Douglas Stuart, *How to Read the Bible Book by Book* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2002).
- ^{vi} N. T. Wright, *The Early Christians Letters for Everyone: James, Peter, John, and Judah* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2011), 61.
- ^{vii} “Building Gothic Cathedrals” PBS - <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/nova/ancient/building-gothic-cathedrals.html>
- ^{viii} Nicole Johnson, *The Invisible Woman: When Only God Sees* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2005).
- ^{ix} John H. Walton, Victor H. Matthew, and Mark W. Chavalas, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: Old Testament* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000), 554.
- ^x Walton, Matthew, and Chavalas, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary*, 554.
- ^{xi} Bargill Pixner, *Paths of the Messiah and Sites of the Early Church from Galilee to Jerusalem* (San Francisco, CA: Ignatius Press, 2010), 320–322.
- ^{xii} N. T. Wright, *The Early Christians Letters for Everyone: James, Peter, John, and Judah*, 61.
- ^{xiii} Note: If you look back at your Old Testament to Isaiah 28:6, you won’t find the “in him” because it’s not in the original Hebrew. It just says, “Whoever believes will not be in haste” (Isaiah 28:6). Our Old Testaments are translated from the Hebrew, but the New Testament writers quoted from the Greek translation of their day, called the Septuagint (LXX), which did include “in him.”^{xiii}
- ^{xiv} Peter H. Davids, *The First Epistle of Peter, The New International Commentary on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm B. Eerdmans, 1990).
- ^{xv} <https://www.lego.com/en-us/lego-history/lego-system-in-play-60d5efbce6cf46a78794f108b3c19bda>