

1 Peter 2:1-10 – Living Stones¹

Fellowship question: (Use *one* of these to break the ice, to begin some discussion and lead into the study):

Do you take a daily vitamin?

What is something you once did not know how to do, but do “naturally” now? (social skills, job skills, hobby, driving, etc.)

Information

Peter uses many metaphors to describe our life in Christ such as clothing, a child, seeds, a stone, and a temple. This is helpful to us, because abstract concepts are difficult to picture. “Things,” however, are easier for us to visualize. We “see the thing”, then we “get the concept.”

“William Carlos Williams (1883-1963) is famously known for coining the term: ‘No ideas but in things.’ This one line from the 1927 version of his poem, Paterson, became a mantra for poetry in the early 20th century. Its expression is still strongly influential today. It changed the look and feel of poetry, possibly more than any other single idea in the past hundred years.... Williams meant for poetry to focus on objects rather than mere concepts, on actual things rather than abstract characteristics of things. The mention of any object creates a visualized idea in our minds—we form an image of the thing. This does not happen at the mention of abstractions, like ‘truth’ or ‘memory.’ Abstract words do not create images in the mind. Only ‘things’ create visual images. Things can be tangible, such as a wheelbarrow. Or things can be a behavior, such as a sidelong glance. The image of a thing creates an idea of what the thing means in the context it is used. Hence there are ‘no ideas but in things’ according to Williams.”²

- Have a class member read 1 Peter 2:1-3.

This passage begins with a “therefore,” so we must look back to see what it is “there for.”

- Have a class member read 1 Peter 1:23.

¹ This lesson is copyrighted by Dr. Rick Jordan, Great Bible Teachers, Inc, 2023. More lessons may be found at greatbibleteachers.com.

² Ed Wickliffe, Historical View of W.C. Williams’: “No Ideas But in Things”, <https://triggerfishcriticalreview.com/historical-view-of-wcwilliams-no-ideas-but-in-things-by-ed-wickliffe/> accessed 9/29/2021.

As he did in 1:3, Peter is reminding Christians that they have experienced a new birth. This makes them behave differently from the way they behaved before. As we grow into our “new person” the old ways will become less and less “natural” for us.

Peter begins by saying “get rid of” all wickedness, but especially sins that hurt the community. The word Peter uses for “get rid of” is one that is also used by Paul and James in their writings to describe taking off filthy clothing. Becoming a Christian should cause a change in attitude and behavior. Imagine someone saying, “She is a good Christian except for her hypocrisy and envy and the way she tears everyone down.”

A major part of Peter’s letter has to do with influencing others to follow Jesus. That person who clings to these filthy habits and sins is doing exactly the opposite.

Recall that in the first chapter, 1:3, 23, Peter talks about the importance of a new birth. We noted that we can be “born again” again and again. When one is born, one must have nourishment. What image does he offer as a positive alternative to filthy clothing? (an infant longing for breast milk).

- Have a class member read Psalm 131.

Here we have an image of God as a mother with a weaned child, which implies there had been a time the mother breastfed the child.

Think about what happens between a mother and child during breastfeeding. How do some of those things relate to our spiritual lives with God? (wholesomeness, closeness, identity, nutrition, bonding, etc.)

Breastfeeding is emotionally nurturing for both the baby and the mother. In a similar way, to make time to be alone with God, to enjoy abiding in God’s love, to meditate on the words of scripture – these are the simple ways we connect with the nurturing presence of our God.

Paul (and Hebrews) use the image of milk as meaning “first food” that one should grow out of so one can eat solid food. That is not Peter’s image here.

How is Peter’s image different? (staying connected with God in an intimate way gives us spiritual strength and growth, we rely on God to provide for our spiritual nutrition, etc.)

“Christian meditation, very simply, is the ability to hear God’s voice and to obey [God’s] voice. It is that simple. I wish I could make it more complicated for those who like things difficult. It involves no hidden mysteries, no secret mantra, no mental gymnastics, no esoteric flights into the cosmic consciousness. The truth of the matter is that the great God of the universe, the Creator of all things desires our fellowship.”³

³ Richard J. Foster, *Celebration of Discipline: The Path to Spiritual Growth*, rev. ed. (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1988), 17.

- Have a class member read 1 Peter 2:4-8.

Besides being foods, what would you guess these items have in common: thyme, beef spleen, lamb spleen, parsley, salt. [These are the foods highest in the mineral iron.]

If you take a daily vitamin, you probably get plenty of iron. According to the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics,

“Iron is a mineral, and its main purpose is to carry oxygen in the hemoglobin of red blood cells throughout the body so cells can produce energy. Iron also helps remove carbon dioxide. When the body's iron stores become so low that not enough normal red blood cells can be made to carry oxygen efficiently, a condition known as iron deficiency anemia develops.

“Iron in food exists as two types, heme and non-heme. Animal foods such as meat, seafood and poultry provide both types and are better absorbed by the body. Non-heme iron is found in plant foods, such as spinach and beans, grains that are enriched, like rice and bread, and some fortified breakfast cereals. To increase the absorption of iron from plant sources, it's recommended to eat them with meat, seafood, or poultry or a good source of vitamin C, such as citrus fruits, kiwi, strawberries or bell peppers.”⁴

The iron that is used to build a car and the iron that is in your body is the same element, iron (although they are bound to different elements). So, you are flesh and blood - and stone!

In our passage today, Peter encourages Christians to be “living stones” - which you are, physically, in a very small way.

If we were to draw this metaphor out spiritually, how might “dead stones” and “living stones” differ? (dead stones are solid and unchanging, a living stone could move and change, etc.)

“Their temple is not made by human hands, such as the tabernacle or temples in Jerusalem built under King Solomon or King Herod. Together, Peter's readers themselves constitute the temple... These worshippers are also like Jesus in being ‘living stones.’ This oxymoronic phrase evokes the image of a human temple. Jesus is the chief stone upon which Peter's readers are built, and they are being constructed to form a temple, a ‘spiritual house.’ Peter's picture of a human temple is consistent throughout the NT where the community of God's people is seen as the replacement for the temple in Jerusalem, the locus of the Holy Spirit's presence.”⁵

- Have class members read 1 Corinthians 3:16-17 and Ephesians 2:21-22.

⁴ <https://www.eatright.org/food/vitamins-and-supplements/types-of-vitamins-and-nutrients/iron> accessed 7/31/2023

⁵ Dennis R. Edwards, *1 Peter*, The Story of God Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2017), 88, 89.

I had the opportunity to go to Israel. In the tour I joined, we visited the sites you might expect, but we also spent significant time visiting with the people of Israel – Jews from New York now living in a kibbutz, a priest who operated a school for Jewish, Muslim, and Christian children together, a PLO officer and others. One, a Palestinian Christian in Bethlehem, pulled me aside and said, “Thank you for coming to see us. Many people come to see the rocks, the ruins, the dead stones. But few come to encourage the living stones. It is hard to live here as a Christian. Pray for us.”

Have you ever thought of our Christian brothers and sisters in Israel or other countries where they are a persecuted minority? What should our role be in helping these “living stones” who are clinging onto life?

What is our role to “living stones” who are “undocumented” in our own country? (Are we Christians first, Americans second?)

Next, Peter offers several Old Testament passages that, in retrospect, seemed to be talking about Jesus. Jesus is the ultimate “living stone” that suffered persecution, rejection and death. This stone now lives as a “rock that makes [unbelievers] fall.”

The greatest disadvantage of a holy place such as a temple is that it is set in a place. It is limited to a geographical location. The good news of Jesus is unlimited, however. That means that the presence of God must be represented not in a single city but over the whole world.

“It is ... important that the scattered communities to which he is writing get it firmly in their minds that they, too, are part of this new Temple. God is no longer to live in a Temple in Jerusalem, but in the ‘spiritual house’ which, made up of ‘living stones’, is being built all over the world. God wants, after all, to fill the whole world with his glory (Numbers 14:21, Psalm 72:19).”⁶

Apparently, Peter did not want us to get bogged down in this metaphor, so he gives us several more to ponder.

- Have a class member read 1 Peter 2:9-10.

Protestants and Baptists love this text. It is the foundation for our belief in the “priesthood of all believers.”

“Priests are to represent fellow humans before God, and to represent God to their fellow humans. God has chosen all believers as priests, not just ordained clergy.”⁷ How do you feel about that

⁶ N. T. Wright, *The Early Christian Letters for Everyone: James, Peter, John and Judah* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2011), 62.

⁷ Tony Cartledge, “Living Stones,” *Nurturing Faith*, May 18, 2014.

statement? How is that done in our church? (everyone can pray, interpret Scripture, minister in the community, etc.)

Transformational exercise

I would like to read for you an illustration from a leaflet called, “The Priesthood of All Believers.” As you listen, think about this question – which church are we more like?

Ministering As Priests⁸

“In the middle of a declining community, a large congregation worships. I was surprised to learn they spent a million dollars on a family life center. Then I remembered that two blocks away is a large public housing development. What a ministry the new center can be to that largely unreached population. ‘What programs are you offering to the folks in public housing?’ I asked. ‘None’ was the reply. And none is planned. The folks in those apartments need priests. Who will be priests to them? Not the members of the nearby congregation.

“Another congregation sits in a declining neighborhood in another city. As you drive by that church, the sign in front of the building catches your attention. Instead of a typical ‘Oakhurst Baptist Church’ on the sign, it reads: ‘Oakhurst Baptist Church meets here.’ The church is a group of priests ministering in the community; it is not a building. The priests merely use the building as a meeting place to worship and to plan for and launch ministry. The people in that declining community know who the priests are because they minister to them in many ways.

“The priesthood of all believers calls each Christian to minister as an individual and in community. ‘The church is the church only when it exists for others,’ concluded Dietrich Bonhoeffer.”

Which church are we more like?

[Close in a prayer something like this:] *We thank you God that you invite us to be as close to you as a mother feeding her infant child. Without this nourishment from you, our souls will wither and die. With that nourishment, we live as living stones that make a living temple. With your nourishment, we can grow to be priests to one another and to the community around us. Thank you for your call on our lives and your nourishment of our souls. Amen.*

⁸ Carolyn D. Blevens, “The Priesthood of the Believer”, jointly published by the Baptist History and Heritage Society and the William H. Whitsitt Baptist Heritage Society.
<http://www.centerforbaptiststudies.org/pamphlets/style/priesthood.htm> accessed 7/31/2023.