

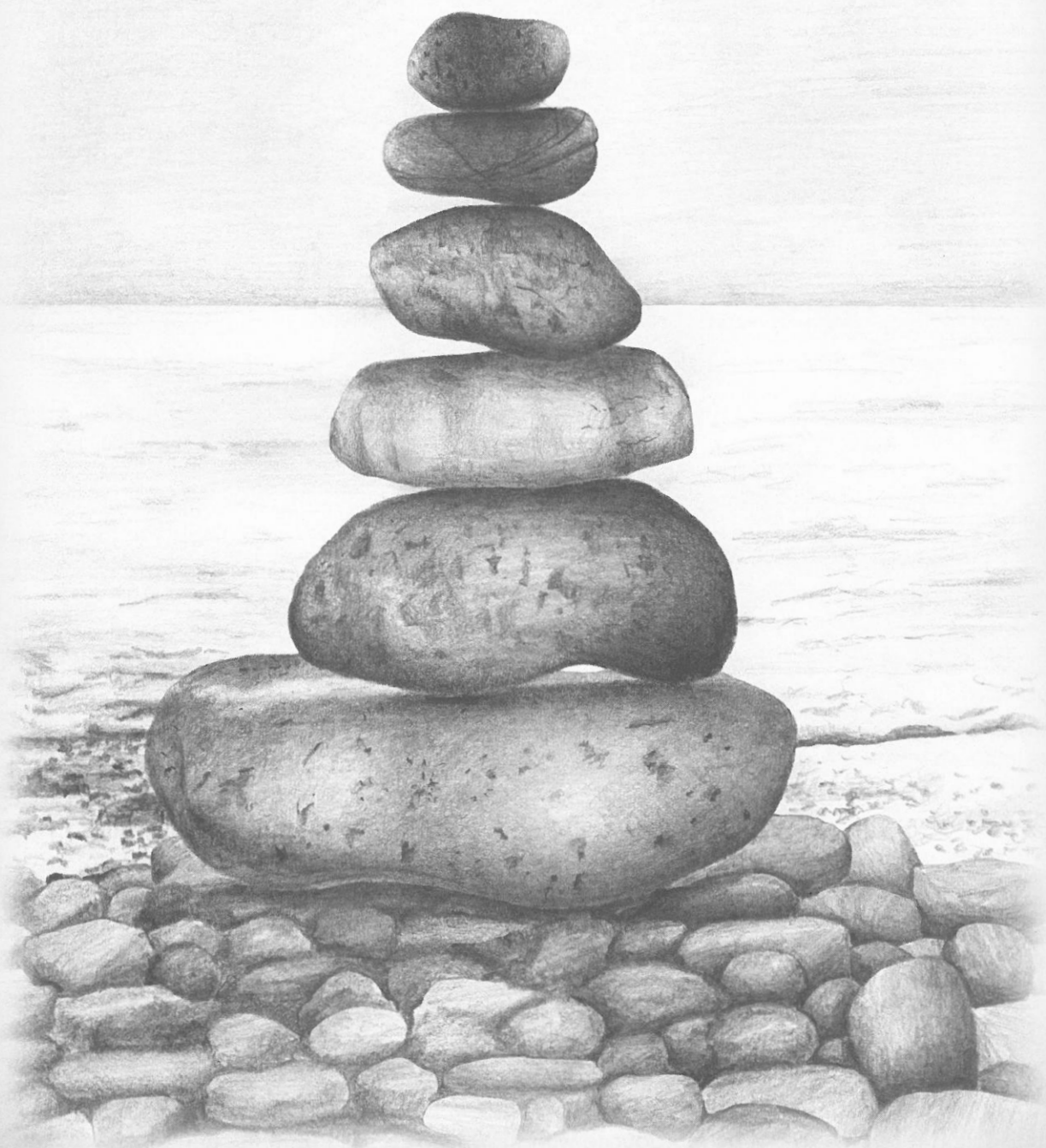
WOMEN OPENING THE WORD

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# LIVING STONES

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CASANDRA MARTIN



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# Living Stones

*“you yourselves like living stones are being built up as a spiritual house,  
to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices  
acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.”*

*1 Peter 2:5*

God often uses simple pictures and everyday objects to teach us the deep truths of His kingdom. Embedded in 1 Peter is a snapshot that has the power to turn our souls upside-down. Stones become a frame for helping us understand and embrace the deep, satisfying, empowering faith God longs for us to have. Rocks rising from the pages of the Bible teach us how to walk with God, answer His call, live in His grace, surrender to His purpose, and experience the soaring joy, profound peace, and overwhelming abundance God has always meant for our hearts. Living Stone faith lives in the fullness of Jesus.

Too many times, however, we settle for an imitation. Our world sells us Pet Rock faith as a convenient, less-messy version of what it means to walk with God. God always leaves the choice to you – Pet Rock faith or Living Stone faith? Pick up a rock, open your Bible, and discover what God wants to build in you.

## Welcome to WOW!

*Women Opening the Word* is a Bible study series designed to help women more richly and fully experience the presence of God. Meeting God in the pages of a WOW study opens your eyes to the wonder of God’s love and the purpose of living deeply in His presence. Transformation is at the heart of studying the Bible. God wants you to be transformed into His likeness – to look like Jesus. The WOW Bible studies help you to answer the call to live as changed women – cross-shaped, resurrection-empowered, faith-driven, Christ-exalting women.

Whether you use the study in a classroom, small group setting, or in your personal quiet time, WOW focuses on answering three challenges every woman who longs to live closer to God faces: **Commitment** – WOW’s four-day format is designed to help you find the time to develop the discipline of daily Bible study. **Confidence** – At times, Bible study seems intimidating and overwhelming. WOW guides you on a walk through Scripture to seek God’s face and experience His transformation as you connect God’s truth directly with your life. **Creativity** – When studying the Bible feels stale, the WOW studies provide refreshing and innovative ways to encounter God through a variety of study methods, insights, and the following special features:

**Day 1** **Days 1-4** – Each lesson is broken into four parts. As you begin a lesson, start with Day 1. Work through the first day – open your Bible, enjoy the time with God, and experience the life-changing lessons He has planned for you. Tomorrow, study Day 2 and so forth. The WOW studies are designed this way to help you spend daily time deep in the presence of God. There are many lessons, treasures, and blessings God wants to pour into you as you spend time with Him in His Word. Spreading out each lesson over four days provides the best opportunity for you to absorb as much richness as you can from your time with God.



**Open Your Bible!** – When you see this symbol, it indicates an opportunity to open your Bible and meet God in its pages. God speaks to you through His Word. He longs for you to take off your sandals and draw near to Him on holy ground. Choose an accurate, reliable, and readable translation. This study specifically refers to the ESV – English Standard Version. You are welcome to use any translation you prefer. The important thing is to open your Bible and prepare your heart to meet your amazing God.



**Living Stone Question** – The picture of a rock embedded with the cross invites you to slow down and answer a question that speaks directly to your heart, pointing it to the truths that move you toward transformation. They are thought questions. Everyone’s answers will be personal and unique. They are designed to help God’s Word speak directly to your life.



**To the Heart** – These are messages from my heart to yours. These special thoughts have one purpose: to help you experience the glorious richness of God’s love in a personal and intimate way.



**What Are You Made Of?** – Having Living Stone faith always begins with a choice. What standard will I choose? Will I commit or compromise? At the end of Days 2 and 4, there are places for you to stop consider the substance of your faith. This faith check is designed to help you examine your heart in the light of the lessons God reveals through our walk through His Word. *Pet Rock Faith* helps define the ways the world encourages you to choose convenience over consistency or self-sufficiency over surrender. *Living Stone Faith* focuses your attention on what it means to live in the fullness of a Christ-focused commitment. *What Are You Made Of?* offers a place to examine the substance of your faith. Here you will find a question or activity meant to help you look deeply at your own heart in the light of God’s grace and His desire and purpose for you. Your answers will help reveal where God wants to work in your life, places that require surrender, obstacles that are keeping you from living with deep faith, and choices you can make that will help you experience the power of walking with Living Stone faith.

# Leading a WOW Study

Leading a WOW study is primarily about opening the door to the presence of God and helping the people with you to make the journey. You already have the tools you need – a willing and loving heart, prayer, your Bible, the help of the Holy Spirit, and your WOW book.

There are as many different ways to effectively use a WOW study as there are people excited about meeting God in His Word. The WOW studies are designed to be flexible and allow you to adapt the study to your individual and group needs. Be creative! The WOW studies are tools meant to help you dig deeply into God's Word. Use them in the way that best helps you meet God, experience the depth of His love, and be transformed into the likeness of His Son.

If you are leading a WOW study in a **45-minute Bible class format** –

*Commit to spending time in prayer and study.* Pray for the women in your group. Ask God to create an environment among your women that will allow Him full access to every heart. As you study, remember to honor the truth that you are meeting God in the pages of His Word. Let His love touch you first; then prepare to share that love with others. Leaders always receive deep blessings from the time spent preparing to share God's Word with others.

*Divide each lesson into two parts.* Using the Day 1-4 markers, ask your class to study Days 1 and 2 on week one, Days 3 and 4 on week two, and so forth. There is enough material in each two-day block to meet the needs of your class time.

*Use the What Are You Made Of? chart at the end of Days 2 and 4 to help you focus on the main points of the lesson.* This is the one truth with which you want the class to walk away at the end of your time together. Use them to guide your preparation and the direction of the class.

*Allow the class to be discussion-oriented.* The Living Stone Questions are designed to open the door for sharing thoughts, feelings, questions, and perspectives. It often takes time for women to open their hearts and be transparent. Be patient and loving. This time of discussion will help each woman plant the truth of God's Word deeply into their heart.

*Keep your eyes open for the ways God is working among you.* Take special note of the many ways God is blessing your time together as a group of women studying His Word. Let that awareness be a springboard for praise, thanksgiving, and renewed surrender.

If you are leading a WOW study in a **90-minute women's Bible study format** –

*Commit to spending time in prayer and study.* Pray for the women in your group. Ask God to create an environment among your women that will allow Him full access to every heart. As you study, remember to honor the truth that you are meeting God in the pages of His Word. Let His love touch you first; then prepare to share that love with others. Leaders always receive

deep blessings from the time spent preparing to share God's Word with others.

*Do one lesson per week, or divide the lesson into two pieces.* This depends on your schedule and the amount of time your women want to devote to the study. Either way, there will be enough material to meet your needs.

*Use the What Are You Made Of? chart at the end of Days 2 and 4 to help you focus on the main points of the lesson.* These are the truths with which you want the class to walk away at the end of your time together. Use them to guide your preparation and the direction of the class.

*Allow the class to be discussion-oriented.* The Living Stone Questions are designed to open the door for sharing thoughts, feelings, questions, and perspectives. It often takes time for women to open their hearts and be transparent. Be patient and loving. This time of discussion will help each woman plant the truth of God's Word deeply into their heart.

*Keep your eyes open for the ways God is working among you.* Take special note of the many ways God is blessing your time together as a group of women studying His Word. Let that awareness be a springboard for praise, thanksgiving, and renewed surrender.

If you are using a WOW study for **personal study**—

*Commit to spending time in prayer as you study.* Prayer is indispensable to preparing your heart to meet God. Prayer and study go hand-in-hand and allow your heart to respond to the truths and direction God is teaching you.

*Use the Day markers to help guide you in daily Bible study.* As you begin a lesson, begin with Day 1. Work through the first day – open your Bible, enjoy the time with God, and experience the life-changing lessons He has planned for you. Tomorrow, study Day 2 and so forth. The WOW study is designed this way to help you spend daily time deep in the presence of God.

*Use the What Are You Made Of? chart at the end of Days 2 and 4.* Open your heart to the deep transformation God wants to work in your life.

*Keep your eyes open for the ways God is working in you.* Take special note of the many ways God is blessing your time with Him. Let that awareness be a springboard for praise, thanksgiving, and renewed surrender.

## Joy for the Journey

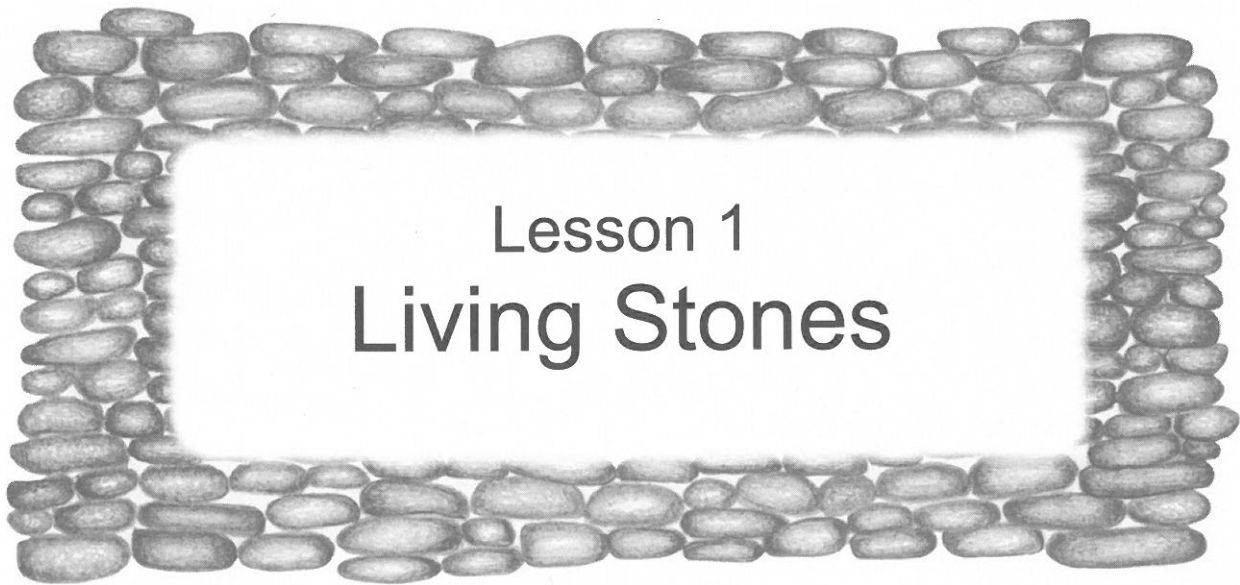
May God richly bless you as you spend this time in His Word. He has so many treasures to share with you because you are the treasure of His heart. Know that as you study, you are covered with prayer and thanksgiving. My prayer is that you will be able to see God's words fully take shape in your life as you commit your heart to imitating Jesus and experiencing the richness of Living Stone faith.

*Cassandra*

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Thank you for choosing WOW! Prayer covers you as you begin this journey. Prayers of thanksgiving for your heart and your desire to seek His face. Prayers for joy and peace to be yours as you open His Word and hear His voice. Prayers for delight and hope as you walk deeper into His love. Prayers for His power and His purpose to move mightily in you as you embrace everything it means to be a Living Stone. Prayers for courage as you answer the call to surrender to His transformation. Mostly, I pray that you will see Jesus. I pray His presence will ignite a fire in you that cannot be extinguished and raise a passion in you that fuels your walk with Him into eternity.

## Day 1

It all began in 1975. Gary Dahl was with friends, and the conversation turned to pets. After some discussion of the troubles surrounding having conventional pets, Gary commented that a rock would make the perfect pet. No clean up, no discipline issues, no mess, and no cost.

What began as a joke made Dahl a millionaire. Gary spent the next two weeks creating Pet Rocks. He found a one cent small grey stone at a builder's supply store that he thought would work perfectly. Creating a cardboard carrying case similar to a pet travel box, he then wrote an instruction manual on how to be the proud owner for a Pet Rock.<sup>1</sup> The manual included care instructions and training tips. Commands like "sit" and "stay" came naturally to the Pet Rock. Tricks like "rolling over" required a little owner assistance.<sup>2</sup>

For six months in 1975, Pet Rocks were the fad phenomena. Dahl sold millions of Pet Rocks and became an instant celebrity. At \$3.95 each, they were the perfect no-fuss pet.<sup>3</sup>

## Living Stones

Although Pet Rocks didn't stay on store shelves for long, they continue to have an enduring impact in our culture. There is something appealing about Pet Rocks. We know the value of having the real thing, but a pet that doesn't demand anything, is always compliant, and makes us feel good has a certain appeal.

So does Pet Rock faith.



Read 1 Peter 2:4-5.

How is Jesus described in this passage?

What picture of Christians does Peter draw?

For what purpose are the living stones being built together?

Peter, the author of 1 Peter, was an apostle, although not the one you would expect to find by Jesus' side. Fiery, uneducated, impulsive, and prone to sticking his foot in his mouth, Peter walked with Jesus and discovered the jaw-dropping, eye-popping meaning of grace.

Decades later, Peter wrote a letter to those facing heart-breaking struggles and the fire of persecution. It is a message sent to those who lived in a world that was increasingly hostile to faith.



In what way does our culture mirror the times in which Peter wrote his letter?

At the beginning of the second chapter of his letter, Peter draws on a picture that Jesus painted for him during those days when he walked by the Master's side. It is a picture of a rock – immovable, steadfast, secure, resolute, and unwavering. Have this kind of faith, he says, and you will be living out the character of Jesus to His good purpose and delight.

Peter begins by pointing to Jesus, the original Living Stone. Jesus faced rejection, suffered hardship, endured cruelty, and grieved over the hard hearts that surrounded Him. He knows how it smarts to hear a joke spoken at the expense of faith, what it means to hear God's name mocked, and how it feels to see the culture in which you live claim God without turning to Him.

Rejected by men, Peter reminds us that Jesus is chosen and precious in the sight of God. So are you. The sting of the world's rejection is softened and healed in the light of His presence. The world may cast you aside, but God chooses you, wants you, and desires you.




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Our society may belittle you and declare that you are nothing special, but you are precious and valuable in the sight of our Lord.

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Because of Jesus, God is willing to work an amazing transformation in you. He is willing to work in your life to make you look like Jesus. Like our Living Stone, God is shaping us into Living Stones for His glory and purpose. Our journey together will explore what this transformation looks like and what it means to be a Living Stone in Christ.



**What do you think it means to be a Living Stone?**

Here is the challenge. It's easier to have Pet Rock faith. Our society encourages us to have Pet Rock faith, creates a climate that promotes Pet Rock faith, and rewards those who choose Pet Rock faith. Pet Rock faith is faith without all the mess of discipleship. It is a faith that you can carry in your pocket, comforted by its weight and the knowledge that it is close by if you need it. Pet Rock faith can be taken out in a crisis or displayed as a badge when necessary. You can dress it up or put it in a drawer, depending on your mood. Pet Rock faith is never inconvenient, disruptive, demanding, or challenging. It is also never alive.

Living Stone faith is messy. It requires everything. It demands, disrupts, and redefines the soul as it calls us deep into the person of Jesus. Nothing is off limits. Total commitment is the starting line. It stands as light in the darkness, disturbing the spin our society puts on sin, calling the world to Jesus and being hated for it. It is also the only way to truly live.

## Living Stones

Living Stone faith or Pet Rock faith? That is going to be the challenge and call of Peter's message. Do we want *living* faith or *easy* faith? Do we want transformation or a top-coat? Do we want a faith that can move mountains or makes a pretty picture? Do we want a faith that looks *like* Jesus or looks *at* Jesus from a distance?

Pet Rock faith is easier – no mess, no fuss, no inconvenience, no cost. It provides a measure of comfort, a badge of belonging, a balm for guilt, and lets us fit into the world. Living Stone faith is harder – obedience is required, surrender expected, and dying to self is a must. But in Living Stone faith we meet Jesus. We walk with Him, learn from Him, grow in Him, and live in all the richness, vibrancy, abundance, and blessing that comes from giving up what we can see so that we can experience everything He has to show us.

Use the space below to talk to God about the kind of faith you want to have.

## Day 2

Jesus is our Living Stone. Peter's letter tells us that God is working in us to shape us into His image. Forming us into Living Stones allows Him to build us together into a spiritual house, becoming a dwelling place for His presence and a platform from which to sing His praises.

The call to experience this transformation is a call to Living Stone faith. Living Stone faith is one in which we actively display the character of God in our lives. It rests in the deliberate decision to look like Jesus. Our world promotes a substitute faith that we are calling Pet Rock faith. It looks like faith, has some of the feel of faith, but doesn't have the depth, commitment, or richness of Living Stone faith.

Moving through the pages of the Bible, an interesting set of pictures unfolds. Rocks and stones are everywhere. They serve as pillows, altars, instruments of victory, places of hospitality, memory markers, tools for guidance and learning, and pictures of grace. They become our teachers. We can learn what it means to have Living Stone faith by allowing God to escort us through these faith stories and by examining what they teach us about living in the character of God.

Today we will start at the beginning. Not the beginning of the Bible, but with the One who was before the beginning.

Read Isaiah 51:1; then write 2 Samuel 22:32.

God is our Rock. Becoming Living Stones begins with understanding that we are reflections of the One who made us. We are created in His image. Living Stone faith flows from the truth that God is our Rock. Having the kind of faith that can stand firm and deliberately choose Jesus in a world that challenges us to accept Pet Rock faith requires having a clear picture of the One who calls us to be like Him.



In what way is God your Rock?

Read the following Scriptures, noting what we learn about God's heart in each passage.

Deuteronomy 32:4

1 Samuel 2:2

2 Samuel 22:2-3

Psalms 31:3

Psalms 62:6-7

Psalms 71:3

Psalms 92:15

Isaiah 26:4

## Living Stones

God is our Rock, and as we look deeply into this picture we begin to see a beautiful picture of His heart. Our Rock is perfect. He is a safe place in which to entrust our souls. He is just, faithful, righteous, and holy. He is committed to leading us, guiding us, protecting us, and saving us. He is worthy of our trust, praise, surrender, and worship.



Why is having this picture of God as our Rock so vital to developing Living Stone faith?

We live in a world in which the one constant is change. Every day the world around us shifts. Progress is the hallmark of modern society. Newer, better, and faster become the standards by which we measure our lives. Fluidity, even when it comes to faith, is heralded as a virtue. Yet, our hearts hunger for a constancy that our world says is no longer possible. Our souls were made for faithfulness, not fluidity.

In contrast to the world's swirling standards, we can declare with praise that God is our Rock. He is unchanging, faithful, steadfast, and sure. Committing to Living Stone faith means that we dedicate ourselves to reflecting His character and making choices that honor who He is.

Pet Rock faith, however, subtly encourages us to see God as a Rock in the distance. He is the majestic mountain soaring to the sky across the horizon. A pretty picture, an inspiring vista, but remote and separate from the everyday. Jesus has something much more intimate and personal in mind for you. God is not a faraway Rock. He is the foundation on which He wants you to build your life.

Read the following passages, and note where Jesus wants to fit into your life.

Isaiah 28:16

Matthew 21:42

Acts 4:11

Jesus is the Cornerstone. He longs to be the foundation of your life. He wants you to build your faith on His character, ground your soul in His unending holiness, and rely on His unchanging nature. He wants everything in your life to be connected to His heart.

A cornerstone is not one piece among many in a building project. It is the first and most important stone. It is the starting place. Everything is measured from the cornerstone. Everything depends on the accurate placement of the cornerstone. Where you start determines where you finish. What you build on dictates how steady the structure is going to be.





**Why is it essential to Living Stone faith that Jesus be the cornerstone of your life?**

Living Stone faith is built on the person of Jesus. It grounds itself in His grace, refusing to build itself on anything but the cornerstone of Christ. His words become the measure of what is valuable and worthwhile. His actions are the standard for our movements and choices. His obedience sets the bar for our surrender. His life becomes our model, His death our doorway into life, and His resurrection the power by which we are transformed.

**Examine your foundation. What percentage of your choices, attitudes, and actions do you filter through the cornerstone character of Christ?**

At the end of Days 2 and 4 in every lesson, we will stop and take an inventory. Every day we have a choice – Pet Rock faith or Living Stone faith? Pet Rock faith will encourage us to take the easier, more convenient, less costly path. Living Stone faith will challenge us to live deeply in God's purpose as He transforms us to look like Jesus. Use this as a place of reflection and prayer as you examine your heart and invite Him to call you and change you.

## Living Stones

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|  <p><b>Pet Rock Faith</b><br/>I love Jesus.<br/>He is a big part of my life. He provides strength and comfort when I need it. Most of the time, I am doing okay on my own, but it is nice to know that He is there when I need Him.</p> |  <p><b>Living Stone Faith</b><br/>Living Stone faith is "all in" faith. Everything in my life is touched, shaped, and molded by the person of Jesus. I am willing to let God change anything in me that doesn't look like Jesus, even if it is inconvenient, uncomfortable, or costly.</p> | <p><b>What Are You Made Of?</b><br/>Do you have Pet Rock faith or Living Stone faith? In truth, you probably have some of both. Ask God to help you examine your faith. What commitment will you make to having Living Stone faith?</p> |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|

## Day 3

Have you ever driven past a construction site and wondered what they were building? You watched the ground being prepared as giant bulldozers pushed the earth into place. Cement mixers poured concrete as the foundation was prepared. Beams were laid, walls erected, and slowly the structure began to take shape. Finally, one day, the silhouette became recognizable as it pressed against the horizon. The rising structure gave new shape to the landscape around you.

There are a million details that go into the construction of a building. Long before the foundation is ever leveled or the first nail is driven into the beams, someone has a dream and makes a plan. The builder is the one who oversees the details, keeps the construction going in the right direction, and provides the continuity of vision that brings the project together.

Jesus is your Builder.

 **Read 1 Peter 2:4-5.** Describe the building project Jesus is working in your life.

Living Stone faith is a construction project. Our lives are being shaped and molded into Living Stones that are being built together into a spiritual house. Jesus is at the center of every part of this transformation.



Jesus is the cornerstone of this building. Jesus is the blueprint for this building. Jesus provides the material for this building. Jesus is the power that raises this building. And Jesus is the architect and designer of this building. It is His vision that is taking shape within us as we experience the formation of Living Stone faith in our lives.

As Peter writes this part of his letter, you can almost see him picturing Jesus' hands. Jesus had builder's hands.

Read Matthew 13:55 and Mark 6:3. What does it say about Jesus' occupation?

Jesus was a carpenter. His father had been a carpenter, and he taught his son the trade he knew. Everybody in Nazareth knew of the work Jesus did. He built things. It is in that picture of building that what He dreams about for you comes to life.

The New Testament is written in Greek, and the word that we translate as *carpenter* in English is the Greek word *tekton*. While in English, *carpenter* has a specific definition as a wood worker, the Greek word *tekton* is more generic. It simply means a builder. "*Tekton* has been traditionally translated into English as 'carpenter', but is a rather general word (from the same root as 'technical' and 'technology', derived from Greek) that at the time could cover makers of objects in various materials, and builders, from tent makers to stonemasons."<sup>4</sup>

When the Bible says Jesus is a *tekton*, it is describing Him as a builder skilled in the use of a wide variety of materials. He would have worked with wood, used metal, and spent much time creating structures out of rock. Since buildings throughout Israel, even today, are primarily made from stone, one of the natural pictures we can have of Jesus is of Him working with and building things out of stone.

This image of Jesus being a *tekton* takes on an added meaning as we grasp the picture of what Jesus is building in 1 Peter 2:5. Perhaps Peter remembers looking at the calluses on Jesus' hands as he writes about the spiritual house Jesus is building in those He loves. Christ molds us into Living Stones, bringing all His expertise as a Master Builder to our hearts as He forms us into just the right shape and size for His purpose. He then fits each Living Stone together to raise it up into a dwelling place for His presence and a house for His praise.



How does it help Living Stone faith flourish to know that Jesus is your *tekton* builder?

## Living Stones

Living Stones have a different character than the rocks Jesus used as a young man to build things in Nazareth. Though He could study, choose, and shape any physical rock He wanted to use, Living Stones have free will. We can choose whether or not we want the Builder to work in us.



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The development of Living Stone faith begins with a basic commitment: Am I willing to let Christ build in me?

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Before we answer that question too quickly, Jesus wants us to think through all that answering *yes* will mean. He is not offering a quick fix remodel. This is a total renovation, a tear-it-down-to-the-ground reconstruction.

 Read Luke 14:28-30.



Why does Jesus encourage us to count the cost before building begins?

Write Luke 14:33.

What will it cost you to let Jesus build Living Stone faith into your life? Be specific.

Living Stone faith looks at our *Tekton* and gives Him full access to every part of who we are. There are no rooms of our hearts off limits, no special pieces that we insist on hanging on to, no second-guessing, and no holding back. Living Stone faith opens the doors and invites the Builder to make His dream a reality in our lives.

What different attitude might Pet Rock faith bring into the remodeling project Jesus offers us?

Those with Pet Rock faith love the idea of a makeover. A little paint, rearranging the furniture, and a general sprucing up sound wonderful. But Pet Rock faith is content with cosmetic changes. Make me look better, bring in a little more light, make it more comfortable for me, but don't do anything drastic.

Jesus is a *tekton*, a builder. He has a plan for your life, a blueprint for your heart, and a design for your soul, which is beyond your wildest dreams. Making that plan a reality in your life is going to require a major overhaul. Sin is going to have to go. Bad habits, negative attitudes, selfish desires, and destructive thinking are going to have to be tossed. Our minds, our eyes, our ears, our tongues, our hearts, our hands, and our feet are going to have to undergo radical reconstruction. The result will be Living Stone faith – something alive with purpose, resonating with praise, framed in His power, and showcasing His presence.

A Living Stone extreme remodel or a Pet Rock touch-up? The Builder is waiting. The choice is yours.

## Day 4

The journey into Living Stone faith begins with Jesus. He is the prototype and the Builder. He is the One for whom we are named and in whom we find our example. He is the standard by which we live and the source of all life and godliness. In Him, we catch a glimpse of the transformation He promises to work in us if we are willing to risk the adventure of Living Stone faith.

 Read 1 Peter 2:4-10.

What happens in us as we come to the Living Stone?

## Living Stones

What promise does God make to those who believe in Jesus?

How does the truth of Jesus affect those who do not believe?

List the four identity markers that God uses to describe His people.

For what purpose is He transforming us?

According to 1 Peter 2:10, who were you before Jesus? Who are you now because of Jesus?

Peter paints a stunning picture of what it means to stand in the world with vibrant, animated, energetic faith – Living Stone faith. It is something that happens within us as we come to Jesus. Surrendering to Him in baptism opens the door for Christ to take shape in us. As we commit to Him, He commits to building His character within us. The Living Stone transforms us into Living Stones who radiate with His nature and walk in His purpose.

As Jesus commits to building within us, He gives us a picture of the Living Stone dream He has for our hearts. Peter's description of Living Stone faith frames six ways in which this transformation into the likeness of Jesus comes together within us.

**Jesus builds us into a spiritual house.** Becoming a Christian means that we become Living Stones. But these stones are not just scattered rocks covering the landscape. They come together by design into a spiritual house. This is a temple picture. The temple served as the worship place for the Jews for centuries. More importantly, it became the dwelling place of God Himself among His people. His presence rested there in the midst of those called to walk with Him.

With the coming of Jesus, a new temple is being built. It is not a temple made from lifeless rocks, hewn by human hands. It is a temple grounded on the foundation of Jesus Himself and is being constructed out of Living Stones – the hearts and lives of those who walk in His grace and live by His example.



Read 1 Corinthians 3:16. What is the most unique feature of the spiritual house Christ is building?

**Jesus inspires us to worship.** Temple pictures, by their nature, direct our eyes toward worship. Worship is the primary function of a temple. God dwells in the midst of His people, and they draw near to Him, offering worship, praise, and sacrifice. Here Peter tells us that we are being molded into a holy priesthood. In the Old Testament, the priests stood in God's presence and called the people to live holy lives. They offered sacrifices, communicated God's Word to others, extended blessings, called for repentance, and walked as examples of what it means to belong to God.

All of those pictures are wrapped up in the worship Jesus inspires in us today. Worship and praise flow from standing in His presence. Sacrifice is inspired by the blood we see on the cross. We are called to extend the blessing of His grace, speak the truthfulness of His Word, and walk as lights pointing others to the empty tomb.



Read Romans 12:1. What specific sacrifice or act of worship has Christ inspired in you this week?

## Living Stones

*Jesus lifts up our heads.* It is easy to feel beaten down by the world. Our society is persistent in its efforts to make those of us who choose Living Stone faith question whether this path is the right one. Those who commit to Living Stone faith enjoy a unique promise God makes only to His people. We will not be put to shame. He lifts up our heads and compels us to look into His face to see the delight that He has in our choice to be His.



In what way does the world attempt to make you feel ashamed of being a Christian?

*Jesus gives us a new identity.* As Jesus builds us into a spiritual house resonating with the presence of God, we become a people of new identity. No longer shackled by sin, weighed down by guilt, or imprisoned by regrets and what-ifs, we take on the identity of a people molded by and created for God's pleasure and glory. We walk in the world as a chosen people – hearts handpicked by God. We stand as a royal priesthood and a holy nation – individuals defined by the presence of God and radiating with His character. We live as a people of His own possession. We belong to Him, claimed, cherished, and bought with blood.

Write 1 Peter 2:9 in your own words, making it a personal statement of your identity in Christ.



*Jesus empowers us with purpose.* All of this transformation is funneled into God's great design. Living Stone faith has at its core a single purpose – to proclaim the excellencies of Him who called us out of darkness into His marvelous light. Our lives display His power. Our hearts mirror His likeness. Our changed attitudes, motives, and actions declare that He is risen and able to transform even the darkest soul.

List three specific ways in which your life praises the One who redeemed you.

*Jesus changes our stories.* Sin would like for us to think that it has the last word in our lives. The empty tomb shouts that what sin says about us is not true. Jesus is a Savior of new beginnings and fresh starts. The little conjunction *but* in 1 Peter 2:10 speaks to a tidal wave of power unleashed at the resurrection. “Once you were..., but now...” are beautiful, grace-filled, power-packed words. It doesn’t matter where your story started, how it went off course, or what baggage it holds. What matters is the story you are willing to let Him write in you today.



What story do you want your life to tell? What are you doing to let God write His story in you today?

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|  <p><b>Pet Rock Faith</b><br/>A little makeover is good, but a major renovation is really unnecessary. Things are pretty good the way they are. Jesus can redesign things as long as He doesn’t disturb too much. I would like to have the final say before any work begins.</p> |  <p><b>Living Stone Faith</b><br/>Jesus is my <i>Tekton</i>, the Builder. He is the Designer of my soul and the Constructor of my transformation. I am going to give Him full access to every part of who I am so that His dream can completely take shape in me.</p> | <p><b>What Are You Made Of?</b><br/>Jesus is uniquely qualified to be your <i>Tekton</i>. He stands before you with an amazing design for your soul, but only you can decide if you are willing to let Him build. Saying <i>yes</i> is going to require more trust, more surrender, and more dependence than you can imagine, but the results will be stunning and life-changing. The choice is yours.</p> |
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<sup>1</sup> Donathan  
<sup>2</sup> “Pet Rock”  
<sup>3</sup> Whiting  
<sup>4</sup> “Historical Jesus”