

# 1 Peter 2:5

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[ 0 : 0 0 ]     Now in this passage, in his letter, Peter draws on the language and the institutions of the Old Testament to provide a variety of images to describe the Christian community and its role in this world.

I don't have time this morning to explore all that Peter conveys through this rich selection of pictures. What I want to think through with you right now is what's involved in just one of them.

Possibly it's the most paradoxical of them all. This description he gives of the Christian church, of the Christian people, as living stones.

Because it's the last thing you would think of, associate with stone, life. Stone is the very embodiment of what it means to be inert, inanimate, inactive, lifeless.

Even when one comes back to Aberdeen and is impressed yet once more by the granite of which so much of the older part of the city is built. It's still stone.

[ 1 : 1 7 ]     It may be impressive stone, it may be beautiful stone, but it's still dead. But here Peter's talking about living stones.

Now there's some who've argued that when he added the word living, what Peter was saying is, this is a picture. These stones are really people. And living is just a way to alert his readers to think, not just of stones in a physical building, but to see people behind it.

He's saying to the original readers, and to us as well, think of these stones as living, and you'll begin to see what I'm getting at when I'm writing to you about these stones in this house.

Well, it's certainly true that Peter wasn't trying to give a lesson in building construction, in how to go about building a house physically. He is talking about people.

He is talking about the Christian community, about the church of Jesus Christ. But there's more than that. He is concerned with giving insight into what sustains or what shapes the church, into what keeps it alive and what keeps it going.

[ 2 : 4 1 ]     And the word living isn't just a structural marker to convey the thought, I'm speaking metaphorically. The word living is incorporated here and used by Peter to say, this is the key to the life, the vitality of the church of Jesus Christ.

Living is a key part of what he has to say. And so the first thing that we have to appreciate in using this term, living stones, is a foundational truth.

That those who are in the Christian church are living stones, because there is one who is the living stone. The church must never get into the way of thinking of itself, as in some way having life generated from within the church.

There isn't some inherent capacity in the church for life. The only reason that these stones can be called living, is because there is one who can exclusively claim, I am the life.

It's not because of something that we can snap ourselves out of, that we move from death to life. It's not by some process of spiritual self-encouragement, that we leave a state of spiritual lethargy and deadness, and experience the newness of life.

[ 4 : 24 ] It is because of a connection with the one who is life. Now it's been supposed, and with good reason, that when Peter penned these words, his thoughts went back over the years.

Over the years to the scene near Caesarea Philippi, you remember how Jesus there asked his disciples, who do people think I am?

And then he asked the disciples, who do you think I am? And Peter uttered the confession, you are the Christ, the Son of the living God.

And Jesus replied to Peter and said, I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock, I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it.

Now over the years, Peter had grown in his understanding of what Jesus was talking about that day. When he talked about rock and stones, about building, about church, about living.

[ 5 : 46 ] Peter had come to a deeper understanding of the reality of the rock. It wasn't Peter himself. And it certainly wasn't those who claimed to be his successors in Rome.

The rock that constituted the foundational truth was Peter's own confession. The confession he had made regarding the identity of Jesus.

The Messiah, the Christ, the Son of the living God. There alone is the foundation that can bear the stress and the weight of the superstructure of the church of Christ.

So here, in amongst the variety of quotations that he uses, all of them connected with stones and buildings, Peter is, after these years of Christian experience, experience, unequivocally asserting the truth, there is one who is the living stone.

And just as with the living stones, that word living is not just saying, think of this stone as a person, I'm speaking metaphorically. It's not a coded way of saying, don't misunderstand me.

[ 7 : 06 ] He's pointing to the reality of life. Life that is in Jesus Christ alone. The resurrection life of the one who has triumphed over death and who is alive forevermore.

You see, that's what Christianity is all about. That's the astounding fundamental claim of Christianity. Death can be defeated.

No more than it's the case today was it the case back then that those who were dead came to life. But the claim of Christianity is that in Jesus Christ there is new creation.

There is victory over the grave. There is one who was dead and is alive forevermore. And the victory he's achieved is one that goes over all that would spoil or mar or hold down God's creation.

And that's why Peter's obsessed almost with the word living. He keeps using it. Back in chapter 1 he began by saying in his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.

[ 8 : 29 ] dead. This life is the mark the characteristic of all that pertains to Christianity. This is the essence of the new creation.

It is living. It truly has life. And it has life because of the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. if you think you know what life is all about if you think you know how this world takes you haven't grasped anything at all unless in your view of this world and in your view of what life really is you have given place to the transforming hope that comes from the resurrection life of Jesus Christ.

And the only place you will find out about that living hope that reality that will inform and reshape remold and revitalize your life is here in this book.

And so again at the end of chapter 1 Peter comes back and says you have been born again not of perishable seed but of imperishable through the living and enduring word of God.

It is the word that conveys the message that brings life. And then in verse 4 of chapter 2 for a third time Peter uses the word living to refer to Christ because he is the one who in himself has the power of an endless life and who can communicate that life to those who believe on him.

[10:31] Peter is pointing to the one true foundation. God is God now there is something else there in verse 4 and I just mention it in passing because Peter doesn't just point to Jesus as having life and communicating life he adds the words rejected by men there is a dark side to existence in this fallen world you would think that life was such a precious commodity that when it is exemplified in purity when it is shown in its greatest power all would come flocking in adulation to the one who is life but Peter looks back and says no rejected by men there is an antagonism of mankind against what is holy and true and Peter mentions that here not just because he wants to emphasize the truth that

Jesus himself was opposed while he was living in this world Peter is also preparing the ground for dealing pastorally with the Christians he was writing to because they were also experiencing the accusations of wicked men and he was saying to them what you are experiencing is in measure the same as that which the one who is the life from God himself experienced there is hostility that will come to those who identify themselves with the one who is the living stone the world hated him and it will hate you also but he also gives hope he says what does it ultimately matter rejected by men if you can add but chosen by God and precious to him possessing this life that comes from

Christ means you share in the rejection he experienced but way that in comparison to sharing with him the security and the love that comes from the knowledge of the father's good will extended towards you precious to him but here we have first of all living stones based on the fundamental truth about the existence of the church its life and its destiny are not independent not self generated but derived from the life and the destiny of Jesus Christ himself I am the vine and you are the branches he is the living stone and his church is composed of living stones but that brings us to the second thing and that is the weakness of the church we look around us today where is this life if

Christ is the living stone and the people of God are living stones because of their connection with him where is the divine vitality and power that should be evident will we look around us at the professing church of Christ where is the pulsating dynamism that should characterize an institution that has the life the life of the new creation the life of the new world the life that comes from Jesus where is the life force of the resurrected Christ in the church today if there's a picture of a building that seems to sum up the church today it's what you see in Aberdeen and in many other places a former place of worship converted into a pub or a night club that seems to epitomize the loss the flatness the deadness of the church today but of course

Peter isn't talking here about physical buildings he's talking about a spiritual house and that only intensifies the problem and the bewilderment because spiritual doesn't mean something airy fairy it doesn't mean something insubstantial something that's less than real spiritual speaks in scripture and here of nothing less than the empowering presence of the Holy Spirit himself it points to this house that is being built as constituted by and indwelt by God's Spirit and where is the evidence for that where is the evidence of the indwelling of the Spirit in the testimony of the church in the life force of the church pervading our civilization our culture our land its legislation where is the impact of

[ 16 : 26 ] Christian standards of the standards of God's word on the ethos of our national policy making where is it at the very local level in the lives of so many in our communities are they being challenged but to espouse a Christian lifestyle through commitment to Christ himself oh I know it happens now and again I know there is light but it's light very much in a canvas of darkness we to be truthful have to say the church of Jesus Christ is not the effective force it should be it's not the force it should be in shaping the direction our nation goes in it's not the force it should be in shaping the way our communities function it's not the force it should be in intervening pesterily in lives that have gone astray in lives that are sinking lower and lower in despair and bringing light and life into them how has

God's building project gone so decidedly wrong I don't have all the answers but I think Peter points to one of them here it's in the words as you come to him beginning of verse four to whom you come and perhaps it's the very familiarity of the expression the mode of expression that makes us liable to pass by and not appreciate what Peter is saying we talk of the gospel invitation in terms of come to Christ and that's very right and proper we have good scriptural warrant for that we have the example of Jesus himself come to me all you who are weary and heavy laden and I will give you rest it is scripturally proper to talk of coming to

Christ as a way of indicating leaving our rebellion against God as a way of indicating our acceptance of the provision that's made for us by Jesus Christ no no no longer standing far off no longer looking askance at what he freely offers but that's not quite what Peter's driving at here he uses a parallel expression in verse seven at the beginning you who believe and that too can be misunderstood it's to you believing ones and it's not looking back to the experience of first coming to faith as if to locate their believing back at the beginning of their personal history personal spiritual history it's not looking at faith as something connected with the first steps of

Christian life of course it is but it's looking at faith as an ongoing necessity in the life of the Christian to you coming ones it's not focusing on the initial act of self commitment in faith but to an ongoing disposition now the words rendered to and the word rendered coming are found many other times in the New Testament but it's only here in this passage that they're combined in this particular way the point that is being made by Peter is that this is an ongoing activity look how it is he has already said in verse 3 you have tasted that the Lord is good he is talking to the Christian community he is talking to those who have already believed and he says to them as you keep on coming to him he's talking about an ongoing process just as necessary as eating is for physical life so here there is another process of faith that is necessary for spiritual life physically if we do not eat we starve physically if we do not eat we do not have energy we are run down we are unable to function properly and here is the answer as to why the church of

Christ is run down is unable to function properly here is an element in the situation of the weakness and lack of spiritual vitality of the church today and it's in very simple terms come to him it's a picture of coming up close not once but constantly it's a matter of always trying to get closer Peter's talking to the Christian community many of that community would have by this time this letter was written many would have been believers for several years in those Roman provinces in Asia Minor they had in the past come to Christ they had already tasted that the Lord is good and Peter's saying build on that he's saying you can't stop there you have to go on feeding you have to go on building you have to go on coming and you can get closer to him if you really try and you must really try because that's the key to success and through

[ 22 : 38 ] Peter the Lord saying that to us today that's the message he's giving to his church today in its depressed condition you want to live you want to know what it is to be a living stone in this living temple then you must strive to get closer to him you want to know his power in your living then individually and collectively you must realize that we'll not succeed if all we've got is a distant connection if all we've got is a past connection that's not enough the stone that has stood many a year in the wall and has taken buffetings from the wind and the storm and the rain can easily become slackened can easily lose its vital connection with the foundation and the integrity of the whole structure is diminished if the stone no longer stands as firm as once it did if the mortar has become washed out if it's lost its binding qualities and isn't that the case spiritually and the answers get closer to him to whom you coming close not just once back then but day by day and if

I can pursue the imagery just a little bit more you see you can come closer in two different ways the promise here is that life will pass from him to us if we come close but the stone that's going to be part of the structure that's built is no use if it's coming close just leaves it lying at the foot of the wall if we want to have life communicated from him to us we must be found built upon him it's not enough to be near the living stone for this connection of vitality and life it's not enough to come and stay beside Christ we have to be built upon him the church loses its effectiveness if all people want to do is to be connected with it to support it but in some non demanding way all you then get a mere church connection a mere ecclesiastatism what

Peter's talking about is a daily discipline of coming close to him of overcoming the separation that can so easily slip into our lives coming close to banish the coldness that arises when our hearts are diverted into all sorts of other pursuits if you see a church that's ineffective one diagnosis that comes to mind is that church is ineffective because it's no longer intimate with the Lord himself you can't be close to the one who is living you can't be close to the one who is really alive and not know it and not feel it and not find from him the promise that he gives if the church is content to live at a distance if the church is content to devote its prime time to some other pursuits that engross it then its strength and vitality will ebb away physically

Jesus is now in heaven awaiting his own but it's not the divide between heaven and earth that intrudes into his relationship with his people what divides us from him is our thoughtlessness our worldliness our having ambitions and personal targets that are no different from the rest of the world the church where Christ is virtually an optional extra will never be a church of living stones the church that knows life is the church that prioritizes a living relationship with the one who is life himself but thirdly we have to notice that Peter does not really speak negatively he doesn't envisage the church as being defeated he doesn't envisage those whom he's writing to as giving in to the pressures from the world round about them he doesn't envisage them as falling prey to their own weaknesses he's pointing to the strategy for success he is speaking positively as you come to him to whom coming then you will experience the reality of our being built those who come close are those who come to share the experience and power of

Christ he is the living stone and it's the same term that's applied to them living stones the terms are the same because the life reality is the same those who come and come constantly will be sharing in his life and power because they will be vitally connected to him the language of corner stone and cap stones used here perhaps corner stone more precisely when you laid the corner stone in an ancient building you set it four square and you didn't then proceed to chisel and reshape the corner stone so that the other stones fitted onto it the corner stone was the given and the other stones were chiseled and shaped so they fitted to the corner stone and that's the secret to individual spiritual growth it's getting close to him it's having a life shaped to conform to him it's having a life shaped so that there are no gaps between the two stones so that we fit precisely where he himself is and then we share in the strength the vitality the certainty and the empowerment that he communicates that leads us to face up to the challenges of each new day but

[ 30 : 01 ] Peter doesn't just envisage individual spiritual growth his illustrations concerned with many stones yes but it's also just concerned with one house a house in which each stone has its own appropriate role to play there is a collective spiritual dimension to the corporate existence of the people of God it's not a picture that Peter has of so many individuals each getting close to Christ they're also engaged in a joint endeavor to realize in fellowship in vital union with Christ the reality that Christ wishes to see a church shaped after his word a church shaped with a united vision of what he wants to see done it goes even further than that because Peter wasn't writing to any particular fellowship in one ancient city but to believers scattered over five

Roman provinces to many fellowships and yet there was still just the one house there was a unity that ran deeper than any externally perceptible congregation any particular gathering important though that gathering is there was oneness because the living stones are founded not in any local architecture but on the one living stone Jesus Christ himself and they constitute a house and house is Old Testament vocabulary for the temple it's not so much a family that Peter has in mind here but a place where God is pleased to presence himself a place where God is pleased to dwell that's why he goes on Peter goes on to talk about priests and sacrifices he's using temple language he's thinking of the reality of Old Testament times and how it works out now and the question is is the church today a spiritually fit and prepared place for

God to come and dwell are the decisions we make the practices we employ those that will lead God to say here I will sit enthroned for I have desired it here still I'll stay for I do like it well words that we'll find in Psalm 132 in a moment the church that is spiritually alive is the church where God is pleased to come and dwell where the God is pleased to provide blessing because it is the church composed of those who draw their life force from Jesus the life I've got just two closing thoughts the first is the phrase are being built it's passive ultimately God does the building it's his project it's his initiative it's his power we can't move forward in our own strength and hope to succeed it's the gift of the

Holy Spirit whom Christ asked for asked the Father to send and so the challenge initially on our part is to come close prayerfully so that we will know divine blessing not just as individuals not just in a congregational setting but as part of the whole witnessing church of Christ upon earth it's built on divine power and the first call is for us to seek from God that he would build and build mightily in our day and the second thought is not unrelated the challenge is to come close the challenge is to become living stones because infused with life through our connection with him who is the living stone but the very phrase holds out the dire prospect of being simply dead stone there are those who have a life of sorts an animal life a form of existence but not one that unites them to

God not one that equips them to be part of the temple of the living God and enter into his final inheritance Peter points to their fate when he later talks of those who stumble over the stone and so fall the question comes as a challenge to us corporately and also individually what place does the living stone have in my life what hold has Christ over my heart what influence may be seen in the way I live in the way we live of the reality of our attachment to him if we're not built on him we don't have the life that he alone can communicate he is the stone that transforms or the stone that condemns he is the stone that makes us or breaks us the corner stone do we fit into him or do we fall over him are we really alive living stones what am I living stones what are we where is the living stone himself let us pray we acknowledge oh lord our god that our hearts are often cold and so often our lives in our lives we are satisfied with the merest of blessings and yet there is a richness there is a wonder a cornucopia of blessing procured for us by christ the risen lord give to us we pray the confidence ever to draw close to him that we might receive from him give to us not only individually we pray but collectively we crave the day when thy cause thy name the wonder of jesus would not be a thing of shame but that which is obviously alive and powerful in our communities in our cities in our land and to the ends of the earth we crave the day oh lord when there will no longer be deadness a day of small things we have a great savior we have one who has a great salvation we know that there is one who is the chief corner stone that will not be moved grant oh lord that through the empowerment of thy spirit those who are thine will be enabled to build lives of meaning and purpose of dedication and of vision on the one who is truly alive give to us faith if we have it not build us up in faith where it is weak help us when we stumble restore us when we fall and enable us to be found standing confident in that day when he comes so that he will acknowledge us as his and say well done thou good and faithful servant hear us look upon us and bless us we pray in

[ 38 : 21 ] Jesus name Amen the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us all Amen