

## HOPE AGAIN: When Life Hurts and Dreams Fade

## STUDY FIVE

## Hope Beyond Guilt: Becoming Living Stones

*1 Peter 2:4–12*

*In light of your role as a living stone in a building that will never be destroyed, in light of your role as a priest in the same temple, as a chosen race, as a holy nation, as a people for His own possession, as a people who have received mercy, your life will be the reason the world turns to Christ.*

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

**F**OR nearly 2,000 years, Christians have been laboring to build up the kingdom of heaven here on earth. Jesus laid the foundation through His life, death, and resurrection. Ultimately, He is responsible for building His church (see *Matthew 16:18*). He does so through His people. As they spread the King's gospel, new people receive the King and the promises of His kingdom.

Ever since Jesus proclaimed, “Therefore, go and make disciples of all the nations” (*28:19*), His followers have wondered *how* they could best go about achieving this goal.

Some followers have chosen to be roadside preachers or traveling teachers. Others have taken a grittier approach by spreading the gospel through dedicated service to the needy. Other Christians have used books, articles, tracts, billboards, and even television advertisements. Though the approaches vary, all can be effective.

Yet God doesn't want His followers to get so focused on the way they spread the gospel that they neglect their own *hearts* behind their efforts. The attitude behind evangelism mattered greatly to the apostle Peter, and in his first letter, he addressed how Christians can best cooperate with Christ to build His kingdom.

How?

By becoming living stones.



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## Hope Beyond Guilt: Becoming Living Stones

1 Peter 2:4–12



### PREPARE YOUR HEART

As you prepare to study the Bible, spend some time praying to its Author and the Architect of the kingdom:

*Father, thank You for so generously welcoming me into Your kingdom. I am eager to be a citizen who serves the King well. Use my time in Your Word today to shape me into a living stone whose life is a powerful witness to the good news of Jesus Christ. In His strong name I pray, amen.*



### TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

When some of the original recipients of 1 Peter looked up after reading the letter, what they saw looked nothing like home. In fact, many Christians in that day had fled their homes as the storm of persecution assaulted them. So Peter wrote to these exiles to fortify their faith during a time when countless pressures threatened to fracture it.

In *1 Peter 2:4–12*, the apostle reminded his readers of their essential identity in Christ. Peter demonstrated how this identity will not only strengthen believers but will also draw in nonbelievers.



### Observation: The Identity of God's People

The foundation of effective Bible study is observation.<sup>1</sup> Without a frame of strong observations, our interpretations will be shaky, and our applications will fall flat. Read *1 Peter 2:4–12*. Then read it again . . . and again! Read it as many times as you can, and each time you read, keep track of new observations.

### Living Stones—1 Peter 2:4–8

In *1 Peter 2:4–8*, Peter uses the image of stones to create a metaphorical description of the Christian's new identity. Don't worry about discerning all the details about the metaphor right now. We'll look more closely at the imagery's meaning during the interpretation phase. For now, focus only on what the passage says.



## Hope Beyond Guilt: Becoming Living Stones

1 Peter 2:4–12

According to 1 Peter 2:5, what is God doing with these living stones? What are the living stones to do in response?

According to 2:4, 6–7, who is the Cornerstone? What happened to this Cornerstone?

*Each time someone trusts Christ as Savior, another stone is quarried out from the pit, cemented into place through the kind work of the Holy Spirit. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll*

### Other Titles—1 Peter 2:9–12

Then, in 1 Peter 2:9–12, Peter offered clarity to the stone imagery by describing the identity of God’s people. According to 2:9, what four titles did Peter ascribe to his readers? (Hint: look for the words “you are.”)

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_
4. \_\_\_\_\_



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*1 Peter 2:4–12*

According to *1 Peter 2:10*, how does a person's essential identity change when he or she places his or her faith in Jesus Christ?

Peter did not want these powerful realities simply to stay in his readers' hearts and minds. He wanted these truths to move hands and feet as well! According to *2:11–12*, how did Peter want his readers to act in light of their identity in Christ? What would be the result of these actions?

*I believe God is still at work in His church, and I believe that His church will never stop growing until it has come to its fulfillment. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll*



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1 Peter 2:4–12



### Interpretation: A New Temple

The stone metaphor in *1 Peter 2:4–8* appears complex at first, but Peter's Jewish readers would have put the pieces together and realized that he was using the image of the Jewish temple to describe the new people of God. Jesus Christ is the temple's cornerstone—the essential first stone. And He builds all other believers on top of His foundation to create a new temple for God.

Look up the term *temple* in a Bible dictionary (like *Baker's Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology* at [biblestudytools.com](http://biblestudytools.com)), and write down what you discover. As you read, consider these questions: What was the purpose of the temple? What kinds of activities took place in the temple? Why was the temple a key part of the Jewish faith?

Previously, God's temple, and consequently His presence, was planted in Jerusalem. When Jesus died, the temple's veil tore, symbolizing the release of God's presence from the temple (*Matthew 27:51*). Now, God's presence dwells in His church—in the corporate body of believers. And because the temple is comprised of *living stones*, it is a *living* entity.

In what ways does the corporate body of believers today carry out the original purpose of the physical temple in Jerusalem? How does knowing this affect how you live your Christian life?

As living stones comprising a living temple, believers in Jesus Christ can bring the presence of God to the entire world. What a privilege for us! What a gift for the world!



Hope Beyond Guilt: Becoming Living Stones

1 Peter 2:4–12

 Correlation: The People of God . . . Then and Now

As you have already realized, this passage is full of references and allusions to the Old Testament. Yet one of the most important passages Peter points to is *Exodus 19:5–6*. Read this passage, and in the chart below, record all the parallels it shares with *1 Peter 2:4–12*.

| Exodus 19:5–6 | 1 Peter 2:4–12 |
|---------------|----------------|
|               |                |

God shared the words of *Exodus 19:5–6* with Moses right after He miraculously led the Israelites out of Egypt and right before He gave Moses the law. Essentially, these verses explain what it means to be the people of God, so Peter found it fitting to repeat these words to his readers exiled in a world of paganism as they awaited their entry into the heavenly promised land.

An essential role for the people of God—both then and now—is to be a *priesthood* for the world. Jewish priests had the responsibility of entering the temple to offer sacrifices to God on behalf of the people of Israel. Essentially, they acted as mediators between God and the Israelites. Israel’s task, therefore, was to channel God to the Gentile nations.

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*1 Peter 2:4–12*

How can the church act out its role as the priest between God and the world today?

*We are all career priests—all of us. And you're not fulfilling your role as a child of God if you're not carrying out the functions of a priest. Priests offer up prayers. They bring spiritual sacrifices. They represent the needs of others. They traffic in spiritual truths throughout their day. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll*



### Application: Living as Stones and Priests

The final step of the Bible-study building project is application, as it puts the finishing touches on the hard work of observation, interpretation, and correlation. So, what does it mean practically to be a living stone, a priest in this new temple of God? Pastor Chuck Swindoll offers four pieces of advice on living out the Christian identity Peter expressed in *1 Peter 2:4–12*:

1. *Live a clean life.*
2. *Leave the lost no room for slander.*
3. *Do good deeds among unbelievers.*
4. *Never forget that you are being watched.*



**Hope Beyond Guilt: Becoming Living Stones**

*1 Peter 2:4–12*

Have you ever seen your own example or another Christian's example draw a nonbeliever closer to Christ? What action specifically led this nonbeliever to shifting his or her perspective on God or Jesus?

What words would the non-Christians in your life use to describe you? Take some time to reflect. And be honest! Transparency paves the way toward transformation.

Which of Pastor Chuck's exhortations do you need to take more seriously today? How would adjusting your behavior in this way transform you into a more effective priest for Christ?





## Hope Beyond Guilt: Becoming Living Stones

1 Peter 2:4–12

The heart of Peter’s program of evangelism is simple: embrace your identity as one who belongs to God, and you will naturally point others to Jesus. This is what it means to be a living stone. Remind yourself daily of what Jesus has done for you and who you now are because of Him, and you will carry out the role of a faithful priest.



### A FINAL PRAYER

Write your own prayer in the space below. Ask God to use you as a living stone and a priest in new and powerful ways.

#### ENDNOTE

1. To learn about Pastor Chuck Swindoll’s *Searching the Scriptures* method of Bible study, go to the web page, “*How to Study the Bible for Yourself*.”

