

What is God doing? 1 Peter 2:4-10

One of the biggest challenges to our spiritual growth is **a commitment to individual faith**.

I know this isn't one of the top ten challenges in all parts of the world. Many countries do have a focus on the wider community or the wider family.

However, in most **Western nations**, the cultural air that we breathe every day is filled with a passionate focus on the priority of the individual.

The individual is king, or queen, in their world. Therefore, we are encouraged to pursue our **individual dreams**.

Decide what works for you and then put it into practice. Make decisions based on **what you want** rather than on **what others need**.

The message is clear in Western society. Individuals rule. Order your life around your personal desires.

The reason this is such a blockage to real spiritual growth is because it is **completely contrary** to the plan of God.

It is a head on collision, a car crash, with the purposes of God.

Yes God does want personal response. We cannot hide behind family or nation. We must have a true personal faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. However, individual spirituality, disconnected from the people of God, is not what God wants.

This is what he wants to teach us from this section of **1 Peter chapter 2**.

The Lord, who is **good**, wants us to know that he is building a people and that this people has a glorious purpose.

We're told these **two** vital truths in verses 4 and 5.

Listen to verse 4. **Read verses 4 and 5**.

A number of years ago one of my favourite TV programmes was **Grand Designs**. Admittedly it did get predictable. Most grand designs were square boxes with lots of glass. Most people over spent on their budget and lots ran out of money. And it wasn't that uncommon for a couple to end up living in an old caravan in a field in the winter. However, despite all this I loved the idea of people setting out on an adventurous building project.

God himself has a building project! It is the grandest and greatest project in all the world. However, it doesn't involve bricks and mortar and glass and steel. No, it's about people.

Or to use the words of **verses 4 and 5**, it's about the living Stone **and** the living stones who are connected to him.

The living Stone is another way of talking about Jesus

Jesus is the precious cornerstone of the church.

The cornerstone in ancient buildings was the first stone laid. It was usually very heavy and carefully constructed. This is because it had an essential place in the whole building. It was part of the solid foundation and every other direction and dimension of the whole building was set by this one stone.

Jesus is the cornerstone!

- He is the solid basis to build your life upon
- He is the solid foundation and the direction setter for the church.

We're told that Jesus isn't just the Stone, he is the living Stone.

- He is alive, risen from the dead
- He gives life to other people

Which brings us to you and me. **What's our connection with the living Stone?** According to **verse 4**, as we come to him, we are like living stones that are being built into a spiritual house.

This is God's building project. He is building a **big** and **beautiful** people who are connected in faith to Jesus Christ.

When humans embark on grand building projects we normally use the best materials we can find. We reject what isn't up to standard.

What about God? What kind of people will find a place in God's grand design?

Most religions **highlight** and **headline** the saintly people who seem to have lived a morally understanding life. But not Christianity.

The beauty of God's building is not based on the original quality of the stone but on what God will do with them. **This means there is a place for everyone!**

The entry is by faith in Jesus. And then through continued trust and obedience we are all transformed together in a community pulsating with light and life.

Have you come to Jesus? Put your faith in him!

Are we continuing to come to Jesus? We do this as we continue to drink pure spiritual milk, as we hear and heed the teachings of Jesus in the whole of the Bible. As we do this, Jesus will change and mould us all and so make this church even more attractive than it currently is.

This gives the church of Jesus tremendous opportunities to be flexible. We don't need impressive architecture to make an impact on our communities. No, the beauty we need is the changed lives of sinners who are trusting their Saviour. This means churches can meet anywhere!

Please notice **there is no individualism here.** It's not come to the living Stone and then decide if you want to be a living stone as well. It's not that there is a choice between only having Jesus or being linked to Jesus and being part of the church. No, connection to Jesus means we are automatically part of his people. This is the reality of faith. The question is how we live it out.

Or let me put it another way, the Bible expects us to be actively rooted in a local church, gathering regularly and committed to the life of the body.

Look for ways to stay connected. Make life choices that make this easier rather than harder.

Let's line up our life against the plan of God. God is building a people not just rescuing us for individual salvation.

Let me say something else about the spiritual house that God is building.

The language of spiritual house should remind us of the temple in the Old Testament. There are many things that could be said about the temple but the one I want to highlight is the fact that God promised to dwell in the place in a special way. Yes, he was present with his people at different times and in different places but he reserved his special presence for this spiritual house.

The church is the temple of God today. The people of God are the living stones built on Jesus, who together form God's spiritual house.

This has massive implications for what happens when we gather together for public worship.

Why do we feel more moved when we meet to worship than when we are on our own? Why is it better to gather in person than watch online? Why is it better to sing with God's people than sing along to Spotify when out jogging beside the beach?

God reserves his special presence for the gathered people of God. This is because we are his spiritual house, his temple, where he dwells in a unique way.

Some people prefer to visit empty church buildings rather than ones full of God's people. I don't know what they are experiencing but let me tell you – it's not the special presence of God. We get this by meeting with God's people as they gather, not when they are absent.

I am gutted not to be here today. I can't wait to gather again and worship God with my spiritual brothers and sisters. I hope you are looking forward to seeing me to.

Let's always remember, there is more enjoyment of God together than on our own.

As I finish let me mention the glorious purpose for which we are being built.

Look again at verse 5. **Read verse 5.**

We are to be a holy priesthood offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.

Notice the whole people of God make up the entire priesthood.

This is called the priesthood of all believers. Where every Christian is to be active in priestly activities.

One of the main things the priests did was to bring sacrifices to the altar in the temple of God.

Now we are to be offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God.

The key question is, **what are these?** What does it mean to offer spiritual sacrifices that are acceptable to God?

- **First**, they are through Jesus Christ

Everything we do only has merit because of the cleansing blood of Jesus Christ

- **Second**, it involves praising God in **public worship** and **public witness**

This is not the only way of offering a spiritual sacrifice to God but it is the way emphasised in this section of 1 Peter.

Have a look at verse 9. **Read verses 9 and 10.**

So much of this language is an allusion to what God says about his Old Testament people in **Exodus 19**.

Exodus 19:5-6, “If you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all the nations you will be my treasured possession. Although the whole earth is mine, you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.”

The church is now this kingdom of priests, which is an incredible expansion on the situation in the Old Testament. **Then** the people of Israel were the priests to all the nations. But **now** people from all the nations are now the priests to the nations.

What aspect of priesthood is emphasised? Declaring the praises of him who called us out of darkness into his wonderful light.

We can often lament the way God’s name is handled in our nation. It seems that God is actively dishonoured or passively forgotten.

What’s the answer? We are. The church of Jesus is to declare his wonder to the world.

We do this in our **public worship** and in our **public witness**.

Let’s be passionate in our **gathered worship**. Let’s invite people to experience it.

Let’s be **scattered to witness**. Let’s tell those in darkness of his wonderful light.

There are many lost souls. But praise God, he is building a big and beautiful people.

He wants us to be part of it. He doesn’t need us but he has invited us to be involved. Let’s pick up our tools of praise and join him in this grand design.

Let’s pray.