

# 50 DAYS

## WEEK 5: Peter (The Foundation Rock)

### And the Living Stones

**SCRIPTURE: Matthew 16:13-29 and 1 Peter 2:1-5**

By Carol Duerksen

## DAY 1

A skit to act out with your family

CHARACTERS: Detective, Peter

PROPS: Peter wears a costume that makes him look like a rock. It could be a brown or tan blanket or large shirt.

Peter is trying to figure out how to wear and walk in his costume. The Detective approaches him and watches. Peter realizes he is being watched.

Peter: Oh! You caught me!

Detective: What do you mean?

Peter: You caught me trying to figure out how to be a rock.

Detective: Is it hard?

Peter: Well, the rock is hard, of course!

Detective: I mean . . . being a rock.

Peter: What do you think? And who are you, anyway?

Detective: I am a Detective of Divinity, and I am looking for God!

Peter: Well, join the group.

Detective: What group?

Peter: The looking for God group!

Detective: Oh yes! Of course! Is there actually a *group* of Detectives of Divinity?

Peter: Oh, yes! The good news is that there are a *lot* of detectives looking for God! Take me, for example. I found God through Jesus! Actually, Jesus found me first. And then, as I spent time with him, I realized that Jesus is the Son of God! And then, Jesus called me the Rock. And here I am, trying to figure out how to be a rock.

Detective: Maybe Jesus meant something other than you literally being a rock.

Peter (thinks about it for a while): You're right. (Slips the costume off.)

Peter: When Jesus called me a rock, he meant I was a leader in his church. That's a hard thing to do, and it's scary for me because I don't always do the right thing. But I will do my best. And you know what?

Detective: What?

Peter: Jesus called me a rock, and I will call you a living stone. As a Detective of Divinity, you are part of God's family, and that makes you a living stone! How does that sound?

Detective: Sounds great! As long as we don't have to wear that rock costume!

## DAY 2

So what happened to three strikes and you're out?

Story #1: Jesus' disciples are out in a boat on Galilee. A storm comes up. The waves get rough. The boat is pushed farther and farther away from the shore. Things are not looking good. And then a ghost shows up, walking toward them on the water. Except it isn't a ghost. . .it's their friend Jesus! And Jesus says, "No worries, guys, it's me! Every little thing's gonna be all right!"

The ever-impetuous Peter gets so excited! He wants to walk on water too! After making sure he has the okay from Jesus, he steps out and starts walking on the waves. . .until he realizes where he is and what he's trying. The wind is strong, the waves are high, and Peter just plain chickens out. "Help!" he screams, and down he goes.

Jesus rescues him, and there's a little comment about Peter's lack of faith. Strike 1.

Story #2: It's another scary time for the disciples, only this involves soldiers and police. The disciples aren't sure what's going down. Jesus seems calm, cool and collected. But not Peter. He pulls out his sword and proceeds to slice off the right ear of the high priest's slave. This isn't exactly the behavior Jesus' expects from his followers, and he lets Peter know. Strike 2.

Story #3: It's another scary time, but in this case, Jesus is feeling it. He's troubled, worried, frightened. He admits to being scared to death. He wants to pray alone, but he wants major

prayer support from his friends Peter, James and John. "I need your prayer support like never before," he tells them. "Please pray hard with me. This is a life and death situation."

Jesus comes back from his soul-searching time with God, and finds Peter, James and John quietly. . .sleeping! Not praying! He chides them and goes away again.

Three times! Three times Jesus returns to find his best friends asleep on the prayer altar.

Strike 3.

Story #4: Jesus is in trouble. His life is in danger, and Peter is watching from a distance. Not only is Peter not at the side of his friend, but when someone asks him if he knows Jesus, his answer is "Jesus who?" Not only does Peter deny knowing Jesus, he does it three times!!

Strike 4.

Whatever happened to three strikes and you're out?

#### PRE-SCHOOL AND CHILDREN:

Parents/caregivers and children, discuss the things that are a part of your family dynamics and environment that are rules and boundaries, and the consequences when those rules and boundaries aren't respected. Is there a time-out place? How many "strikes" does a person get? What does it mean to be "out"?

Invite children to think about how they would set rules if they were in charge. Have fun with this, brainstorming what their rules would be for your life together. What would be their consequences?

#### YOUTH AND ADULTS

"Diamonds in the rough" are rocks that need to be polished before the living fire within them can be seen. Peter was a "diamond in the rough." We all are.

What parts of your life would you like to polish? Choose one painful aspect. Hold it tenderly. Invite Jesus to help you polish the rough edges. Value what you learned from it. Use it to grow in your relationship with God and others

## DAY 3

Whatever happened to three strikes and you're out? It wasn't Jesus' mode of operating. Jesus accepted Peter as he was and helped him change into what he could become. Jesus looked Peter in the eye and said, "Peter, you . . . rock!"

For every time that Peter repeatedly struck out, there was another time when he "got it." Peter is the disciple mentioned most frequently in Matthew's gospel. He is often the guy asking the questions and giving answers. Peter was the first disciple after the women to see the risen Christ.

Peter was full of faith and flaws, and Jesus trusted him. Jesus called him by his family name, Simon son of Jonah. And then Jesus gave him a new name, saying he will be called Peter (Petros) and on this rock (*petra*), Jesus will build the church. Jesus' trust in Peter enabled Peter to live into those expectations.

And live into them he did! While Paul connected mostly with the Gentiles and James, the brother of Jesus connected mostly with the Jerusalem churches, it was Peter who was accepted by all the churches, both Jewish and Gentile. Peter was the most ecumenical. He played a mediating role between the churches and provided a bridge between the Jewish Christians and Gentile Christians.<sup>1</sup>

### **CHILDREN, YOUTH, ADULTS:**

Play the Chutes and Ladders game with Peter. You will need the game board and a Bible.

Using the passages listed below:

- When someone lands on a chute, have them look up and read a passage where Peter made an unwise choice.
- When someone lands on a ladder, have them look up and read a passage where Peter made a wise choice.

Peter on a firm foundation:

- Peter trusts Jesus enough to step out of the boat. Matthew 14:28-29
- Peter asks questions about how to follow more faithfully. Matthew 18:21-22
- Peter (Simon) follows Jesus. Luke 5:4-11
- Peter left everything for Jesus. Luke 18:28-30
- When others were unsure of the resurrection, Peter went to check it out. Luke 24:10-12
- Peter swims to see Jesus after the resurrection. John 21:4-13
- Peter preaches the first sermon after Pentecost. Acts 2:14-18, 21-23, 32-33, 36
- Peter and John heal a man. Acts 3:1-8

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1. Ulrich Luz, *Hermeneia: Critical and Historical Commentary on the Bible* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2001), 366–369.

- Peter raises Tabitha from the dead. Acts 9:36-41

Peter on sinking sand:

- Peter's fears overcome his trust and he sinks. Matthew 14:30-31
- Peter doesn't understand. Matthew 15:15-16
- Peter misunderstands the type of Messiah Jesus is. Matthew 16:21-23 (Note: this comes right after today's passage!)
- Peter fell asleep when Jesus needed him. Matthew 26:36-40
- Peter denies Jesus. Matthew 26:69-70
- Peter denies Jesus a second time. Matthew 26:71-72
- Peter denies Jesus a third time. Matthew 26:73-75
- Peter misunderstands foot washing. John 13:3-10
- Peter worries that Jesus does not believe him. John 21:15-17
  - Why did Jesus ask him this question three times? (It's most likely because it was the same number of times Peter had denied Jesus.)

After reading these Scriptures, talk about whether Peter seems to be a “good guy” or a “bad guy.” What kind of faith did he show? Direct the conversation toward the idea that Peter was human—he had a family, and he made mistakes. Sometimes his faith was strong, and sometimes it was weak. But Jesus used (and uses) ordinary, broken people just like Peter to build the church! Now that is amazing. In fact, that rocks! Peter clearly stated who Jesus was and became a rock—a living stone. We (ordinary and broken people) are also invited to become living stones—part of a community—part of God's family called the church.

## DAY 4

The book of 1 Peter may have been written by himself, or written in the name of Peter but at a later date, or written in collaboration with a secretary, possibly Silvanus (1 Peter 5:12). 1 Peter was likely written 62–64 C.E. in Rome. This would mean that Peter was alive, and Nero was emperor. Peter is traditionally believed to have arrived in Rome in 62 CE and to have died in about 64 CE. The original intended readers of 1 Peter were scattered believers in several communities in Asia Minor (now Turkey) and the Roman provinces of Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia. They were likely Greek Gentiles who were living under Roman

rule. They had a minority status and were not understood by their neighbors. They lived in a hostile environment.<sup>2</sup>

First Peter applies the teachings of Jesus regarding loving one's enemies to the everyday life of scattered Christians living as resident aliens under Roman rule. Peter tells them to accept and respect all persons and human social structures, even though they have been corrupted by sin.<sup>3</sup> He gives guidelines on how to live redemptively. "As living stones, they are to be active participants in God's household . . . to remain strong and firm in the grace of God and their pilgrimage of faith, hope, and love."<sup>4</sup>

Peter calls for "*putting off* attitudes and characteristics that destroy love in the community" in the same way one puts off unfit clothing. This image is used by Paul (Ephesians 4:31) and James (James 1:21). This sounds simple but is not easy to do without spiritual growth.<sup>5</sup>

Peter calls for continuing in spiritual growth through craving spiritual nourishment, like infants craving milk. This living word of God is further identified as Jesus Christ. The purpose of all this is to continue to grow into salvation. This growth is an essential process. "We have been saved, we are being saved, we will be saved."<sup>6</sup> This is an ongoing journey for the believer, and certainly, one that Peter knows well himself.

#### PRE-SCHOOL AND CHILDREN:

Gather together items from the child's early years: baby pictures, clothing, bottles, toys etc. Talk about the process of growing and changing they have gone through. Do they remember being a baby? Isn't it amazing how they have changed? What are examples of ways they have changed?

Explain to them that Jesus has been with them from their very beginning, and Jesus will always be with them, but their ability to understand and relate to Jesus will change. What are some examples of those changes? (Now they can pray with words, now they know a little bit more about how Jesus wants them to live, now they can be in Sunday school to learn more about Jesus, etc.) Talk about the fact that as they grow up, so will their relationship with Jesus. Jesus will always be there, but their ability to understand and relate to him will change.

#### YOUTH AND ADULTS:

Draw a time line of your life. Write down times when you felt connected to Jesus/God/Holy Spirit in the past and in the present. How and when and where did they happen? Did you seek to make them happen? Were other people involved? Were you "surprised by God"? Did you intentionally work on your relationship through prayer, Bible Study, reading and talking to

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2. Erland Waltner and J. Daryl Charles, *1 & 2 Peter, Jude*, Believers Church Bible Commentary (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1999), 15–22.

3. *Ibid.*, 22.

4. *Ibid.*

5. *Ibid.*, 65.

6. *Ibid.*, 66.

others? Now think about some ways that you want to grow in your connection with God/Jesus/Holy Spirit in the future and write them down. How do you want to nourish your spiritual life in the next days/weeks/years? What can you do make that happen?

## DAY 5

First Peter 2:4 is a warm invitation, actually a command, to come to the living stone (in RSV, "to that living stone"). The invitation is ongoing—keep coming to Jesus Christ who is the living stone. Using the word *stone* to refer to Jesus links to several Old Testament passages (Isaiah 28:16; Psalm 118:22; Isaiah 8:14). However, the use of the word *living* with *stone* is new. Stones are not generally associated with life. The Greek word *lithos* is used for a stone that has been cut and prepared to be used in building. Peter also used the word *living* with other words, like living hope and living word of God. The use of *living* in this metaphor suggests the life-giving and life-nurturing quality of Jesus Christ, as in 1 Corinthians 10:4, where Paul calls Christ "the spiritual rock."<sup>7</sup>

Peter goes on to contrast this living stone as having been "rejected by mortals yet chosen and precious in God's sight" (1 Peter 2:4). The rejected stone becomes the chosen stone and precious. It is the Greco-Roman rejection that is referred to here; the neighbors of the believers reading the letter from Peter are rejecting Christianity and are hostile to Jesus' followers.

And then Peter, the Rock, uses the same image for the believers. "Like living stones, let yourselves be built into a spiritual house" (v. 5). For Peter, coming to Jesus is not just an individual conversion, it is also becoming part of the Jesus community, part of the "household." The metaphor suggests being a part of a structure. And it means they are part of something. While aliens in a foreign country, they now have a home where they belong. This spiritual house is described as "a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices" (v. 5). The sacrifices are a metaphor as evidenced by the designation of "spiritual." They are a metaphor for worship and prayer. The "holy priesthood" reminds us of the discussion of the priesthood of all believers in the Reformation and the centrality of that concept for Anabaptists. Everyone in the Christian community is part of this holy priesthood and has equal access to God.<sup>8</sup>

### PRE-SCHOOL AND CHILDREN

#### *Living Stones Handprints*

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7. Ibid., 74.

8. Ibid., 75.

Supplies: salt dough - Mix together 2 cups of flour (or gluten free flour), 1/2 cup salt, 3/4 cup cold water; heavy duty paper plates; small decorative stones - available at a craft store; plastic tablecloth

Advance preparation - make the salt dough and store in an airtight container

Cover table with a plastic tablecloth. Give each child a paper plate and five stones. Give each child a serving of salt dough. This amount should be able to cover the plate when pressed flat. Instruct the children to work their dough around the plate until it is covered. Have them smooth the surface, then make a hand print, and add the stones that represent that they are living stones of Jesus.

## **YOUTH AND ADULTS**

- What does it mean for you to keep coming to Jesus Christ, who is the living stone? How do you do that?

Use paper and colorful markers to create a pie chart of how that happens for you. Give a percentage to the role played by your congregation/community, your friends and family, your personal Bible study and meditation, books you read, and so forth. When you have completed your pie chart, evaluate it.

- How is this working for you?
- Do you continue to “keep coming to Jesus”?
- How would you like to change it?

## **DAY 6**

Imagine that you are Peter, and read the following:

“Jesus values each person; he sees their dignity as God created them. He came to rid every person of shame and self-contempt, of the feeling that they are nothing and can do nothing, the feeling that they have ruined everything and nothing can change that, the feeling that all is



hopeless. He came to assure the disheartened that they can still be reborn. Resurrection is possible again and again, in spite of all our weakness and sin, even if our bodies should perish. ‘

“There remains a precious jewel in every person, which is stronger than any outward pressure in their lives (John 1:19). It remains inviolable, even in those who feel that they are lost in their rottenness. No matter how badly they have ruined their lives, this jewel remains in them; it is as certain as that God was reconciling the world to himself through Jesus Christ. There is something in each person that will never be lost, something that can always be resurrected. That is the gospel.”<sup>1</sup>

Now read it again, as if it is speaking to you.

We began this series with “Peter . . . you rock!” and now we come to “(your name) . . . you rock too!”

You rock because you are a jewel in God’s eyes. The gospel is the Good News that God loves you and that you are a living stone, a precious jewel!

### **ALL AGES**

Look up information on the birthstones for each member of your family. Experts believe that the way birthstones were chosen for each month can be traced back to the Bible, when Moses gives directions for making special garments for Aaron, the high priest of the Israelites. The breastplate was to contain 12 different gemstones representing the 12 tribes of Israel.

From this, experts think that stones relating to the tribes were also linked to Zodiac birthstones and gems which were picked by astrologers before the yearly calendar existed. This eventually led to the 12 month calendar year, and one stone being assigned to each month.

So, each month has a special jewel. Whether or not you and your children have jewelry related to your birthstone month, it can serve as a reminder that you are indeed a jewel in God’s eyes. One option is to purchase a small birthstone gem as a reminder of God’s love!

## **DAY 7**

We are Living Stones; We Belong

By Karen Ediger

1 Peter 2:5

Like living stones, let yourselves be built into a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.

In *Schindler's List*, after the movie is over there is a scene of the graveyard outside Jerusalem where Oskar Schindler is buried. People involved in the movie, production staff, actors, and other bystanders, file to the tombstone and place a small rock on the tombstone. When we visited there in 1994, we did the same and saw others doing it also. It is my understanding that because the land is so dry, the custom is to place a rock on tombstones instead of flowers. Rocks are meaningful in that culture and place.

My mother-in-law had a collection of rocks on her patio, some which she had brought home from vacations. She had the idea that each grandchild should choose a rock and write their name on it. When she and her husband downsized and moved to an apartment in a retirement center, the rocks moved with them and were placed outside their front door on the patio where we all saw them when we came to visit. Those rocks represented her love for her family.

When my father-in-law died, one of his sons suggested that we bring a palm-sized rock to the funeral and ask the pastor to send it through the congregation from person to person. As each person received the rock, they could say a little prayer, a blessing, or remember a particular occasion with Dad. It would end up with the family and after the funeral we would place it on his tombstone. The pastor used various scripture texts which included rocks and connected each scripture to a characteristic of Dad. I remember that it was an extremely cold day in January and the church never did get warm. As the rock was passed from person to person and then came to family members in the row behind us, I heard several of my nieces and nephews gasp when they received the rock. When I received the rock, I knew why. It was warm. It carried the warmth and love of the congregation.

When I felt the warmth of the rock, I felt comfort from all the people who had held it. It was a feeling of belonging.

In 1 Peter, Peter is writing to followers of Jesus who live in the Roman Empire in communities which are hostile to Christianity. These early Christians had frequently been persecuted and are living in fear. As aliens in a foreign country, they need a sense of belonging. Peter writes to encourage them, to teach them, to comfort them, and to give them that sense of belonging as an important part of something greater than themselves. For Peter, coming to Jesus is not just an individual conversion, it is also becoming part of the Jesus community, part to the "household." The metaphor suggests being part of a structure. Jesus had told Peter that he, Peter, was the Rock on which Jesus would build his Church. Here, Peter is building the church. He is building the Church with "living stones." Peter isn't building the Church as a physical structure; he is building a spiritual structure. As he taught these early Christians how to mature in their faith, he gave them the image of being "living stones" as members of the Household of God, the Church. It means they are part of something. While aliens in a foreign country, they now have a home where they belong.

A rock, warmed by the hands of the congregation, gave us a sense of belonging as we celebrated my father-in-law's life at his funeral. The image of being living stones, part of the household of God, gave these early Christians a sense of belonging.

- Can you remember a particular time in your life when you felt that sense of belonging?
- What gave you that sense of belonging?
- Who helps you feel you belong?
- Do we have symbols that help us remember that sense of belonging?

- How can we help others feel they belong?

That rock that was warmed by the hands of the congregation was placed on Dad's tombstone after the service. Thirteen years later, it's still there. Peter gave the early Christians an image of themselves as living stones. Nearly 2000 years later that image is one we as Christians still claim. It's an image we still use to teach our children what it means to belong to the Church.

*Parts of these reflections on Peter and the Living Stones are excerpted from "God Rocks," a 5-session unit of multi-age curriculum (preschool, children, youth and adults) available online from Springs Forth Faith Formation, Inc. See more at [springsforth.com](http://springsforth.com) or email [springsforthfaith@gmail.com](mailto:springsforthfaith@gmail.com)*

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1 Christoph Friedrich Blumhardt, *Everyone Belongs to God*, (Walden, New York; Robertsbridge, England; Elsmore, Australia: Plough Publishing House, 2015), 51.