

SESSION 4

I AM A PRIEST

► ***The Point***

As servants of Christ, we are His representatives.

► ***The Passage***

1 Peter 2:4-10

► ***The Bible Meets Life***

You can't just enter the White House today. You have to have an appointment, and your name has to be cleared by security. While Abraham Lincoln was in office, however, people simply went into the White House each day, hoping for an audience with the President. They just waited in line with everybody else—and hoped. This routine allowed for one exception. Lincoln's youngest son, Thomas ("Tad"), was famous for his undisciplined "run of the house," even interrupting cabinet meetings on occasion. Lincoln adored his son, so Tad always had direct access to his father.

Most of us will never have direct access to the President of the United States. But as followers of Christ, we have direct access to the God of the universe. At one time in biblical history, only certain people had special access to God; they were called priests. Even today, when we hear that word "priest," a specific image of what a priest looks like comes to mind. But as we'll see in 1 Peter 2, Peter called all believers priests. Let's explore what exactly that means.

► ***The Setting***

The apostle Peter wrote the epistle of 1 Peter to Christians in Asia Minor (see 1 Pet. 1:1-2), perhaps in A.D. 60-61. We know ancient Asia Minor as modern Turkey. Believers in this region were following in Jesus' steps by enduring suffering. (See 2:21.) Though their status was low in this world, Peter knew they were a "royal priesthood" (v. 9) with the great privilege and responsibility of devoting their lives to God and declaring His greatness.

What does the Bible say?

1 Peter 2:4-10

Living stone (v. 4)—This metaphor applied to Jesus based on His resurrection (i.e., He is “living”) and Old Testament prophecy of the Messiah as a “stone.” (See Isa. 28:16; 1 Pet. 2:6.)

Cornerstone (v. 6)—The most important stone in the foundation of a temple or other structure. It determines the placement of all other stones included in the building.

⁴ As you come to him, a living stone rejected by men but in the sight of God chosen and precious,

⁵ 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.

⁶ For it stands in Scripture: “Behold, I am laying in Zion a stone, a cornerstone chosen and precious, and whoever believes in him will not be put to shame.”

⁷ So the honor is for you who believe, but for those who do not believe, “The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone,”

⁸ and “A stone of stumbling, and a rock of offense.” They stumble because they disobey the word, as they were destined to do.

⁹ But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.

¹⁰ Once you were not a people, but now you are God’s people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.

GET INTO THE STUDY



5 minutes



DISCUSS: Question #1 on page 101 of the PSG: “**If you could have a direct line to a notable figure in our society, who would you choose?**”

Note: "Notable figure" could include scientists, celebrities, business leaders, and more. Encourage group members to be creative.

ACTIVITY (OPTIONAL): Prior to the group gathering, set up an appointment to call your senior pastor (or another staff

member) during the early portion of your group meeting. After discussing Question #1, above, call your pastor and ask him to deliver a word of encouragement to your group.

Note: If your pastor is preaching or otherwise busy during your meeting time, consider asking him to record a brief video in advance of your group meeting. Then play the video at the appropriate moment.

GUIDE: Direct group members to “The Bible Meets Life” on page 102 of the PSG. Introduce our role as priests in God’s kingdom by reading or summarizing the text—or by encouraging group members to read on their own.

GUIDE: Call attention to “The Point” on page 102 of the PSG: **“As servants of Christ, we are His representatives.”**

PRAY: Transition into the study by asking the Holy Spirit to grant you and your group members a better understanding of your role as priests during this session. Pray that each of you will be inspired as you study God's Word.



10 minutes

STUDY THE BIBLE

Notes

1 Peter 2:4-5

⁴ As you come to him, a living stone rejected by men but in the sight of God chosen and precious, ⁵ 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.

READ: 1 Peter 2:4-5 on page 103 of the PSG. Read the text out loud or ask a volunteer to do so.

ALTERNATE QUESTION:
In what ways do we as believers offer spiritual sacrifices to God?

DISCUSS: Question #2 on page 103 of the PSG: “**How should we understand the metaphors described in these verses?**”

Note: Most of the content on page 103 of the PSG provides clarity on how to understand the two main metaphors in these verses: our status as “living stones” and “a holy priesthood.” Therefore, encourage group members to discuss their own interpretation of the text before digging into the PSG.

ACTIVITY (OPTIONAL): The final sentence of the first paragraph on page 103 of the PSG offers two additional Scripture passages connected with Jesus’ role as the foundation of our lives: Matthew 7:24-27 and Ephesians 2:19-22. Ask for volunteers to read these passages out loud.

GUIDE: Encourage group members to read the bullet list at the bottom of page 103 of the PSG in order to gain more information about the traditional role of a priest in the Scriptures.

TRANSITION: We’ve seen what Peter meant when he described Jesus’ followers as “living stones.” As we move to verses 6-8, we’ll see what he meant when he described Jesus as the “cornerstone.”

1 Peter 2:4-5 Commentary

[Verse 4] The idea that all believers in Christ are priests is a wonderful distinctive of biblical Christianity. We have entered this priesthood as we have **come to him**, that is, to Jesus. Figuratively speaking, Jesus is **a living stone**. He is “living” because He is risen from the dead. He is a “stone” in the sense of the foundation for believers’ salvation and for the spiritual household in which His people serve as priests. We who believe in Him have “come to him” and devoted ourselves to Him by faith. We continue to come to Him daily by faith as we “grow up” into our salvation. (See 1 Pet. 2:2.)

Of course, not all people come to Christ. He is also **rejected by men**. (See Matt. 26:14-15; 27:1-2,26; Luke 4:16-30.) Today, many people still reject the Christ of the Bible. But God’s judgment matters more than the judgment of people, and **in the sight of God** Jesus is **chosen and precious**. He was chosen in eternity past to be the Savior who would offer Himself as the atoning sacrifice for sinners. (See 1 Pet. 1:18-20; John 17:24.) God has honored Him by raising Him from the dead, exalting Him to the heavenly throne, and giving to Him the name above every name. (See Acts 2:32-33; Phil. 2:9.) Though people may choose to reject Jesus, God has chosen Him for honor.

[Verse 5] Jesus now lives to offer His life to others; if we have come to Him, then we also are **living stones**. As living stones, we relate to Christ and other believers to form **a spiritual house**. Jesus said He would “build” His church. (See Matt. 16:18.) He referred to His own body as a “temple” (John 2:19-22). Paul wrote of believers being included in and growing into “a holy temple” and said that we are “being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit” (Eph. 2:21-22).

In addition to being stones in the house, we are to function as **a holy priesthood**. Old Testament priests functioned before God in the temple’s holy and most holy places. (See Lev. 16; 2 Chron. 3:8-10.) Peter meant that as believers we ourselves are set apart and “holy” through Christ. We have the privilege of coming into God’s presence. We are qualified **to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God**. We offer such sacrifices **through Jesus Christ** who gives us access to God.

What did Peter have in mind when he used the phrase “spiritual sacrifices”? Hebrews 13:15 encourages believers in Jesus to “offer up a sacrifice of praise to God.” Hebrews 13:16 calls doing good and sharing with others “sacrifices” that please God. Paul urged believers to “present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God” (Rom. 12:1). Paul also referred to a financial gift as “a fragrant offering, a sacrifice acceptable and pleasing to God” (Phil. 4:18). Jesus taught that God desires mercy toward others over literal sacrifices. (See Matt. 9:13; 12:7.) From these passages, we can conclude that we offer “spiritual sacrifices” when we praise and worship God, humble ourselves in confession and repentance, act in consecrated obedience, do good deeds, and share our resources with others.



10 minutes

STUDY THE BIBLE

Notes

1 Peter 2:6-8

6 For it stands in Scripture: "Behold, I am laying in Zion a stone, a cornerstone chosen and precious, and whoever believes in him will not be put to shame."

7 So the honor is for you who believe, but for those who do not believe, "The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone,"⁸ and "A stone of stumbling, and a rock of offense." They stumble because they disobey the word, as they were destined to do.

DO: Direct group members to complete the activity "Picturing Priests" on page 105 of the PSG. If time allows, encourage volunteers to share their responses.



What does it look like to live as a priest of Jesus Christ in today's world? Select the image below that best represents how you understand your role as a member of the "holy priesthood" described in 1 Peter 2:5.



What are some specific actions you should be taking in your everyday life as a priest of Jesus?

CORNERSTONE



Cornerstones today are ceremonial, usually placed at the dedication or start of a building project.

In biblical times, the cornerstone was the first of foundation stones. It was the first foundation stone put in place that would dictate the placement of the other foundation stones and, ultimately, the construction of the whole building.

Nothing is ceremonial about Jesus as the chief cornerstone! He is the foundation and the chief cornerstone of our faith. (1 Cor. 3:11; Eph. 2:20).

**ALTERNATE
QUESTION:**
**How should
these verses
influence our
understanding of
those who don't
know Jesus?**

READ: 1 Peter 2:6-8 on page 104 of the PSG.

GUIDE: Encourage group members to read the material from page 104 of the PSG in order to gain more information on what a cornerstone was and how that metaphor connects to Jesus.

Note: Ask a volunteer to read the final paragraph on page 104 out loud as a transition into Question #4, below.

LEADER PACK: Display **Pack Item 9**, "Cornerstone," to provide group members a visual reference and more information about cornerstones. Ask volunteers to brainstorm what a "cornerstone" would be in modern construction.

DISCUSS: Question #4 on page 104 of the PSG: **"In what ways do people stumble over Jesus and His message today?"**

1 Peter 2:6-8 Commentary

[Verse 6] Peter first cited Isaiah 28:16. God Himself said, **I am laying in Zion a stone.** The stone God laid is **a cornerstone chosen and precious.** Peter referred to Jesus in verse 4 as a “living stone ... chosen and precious.” In the ancient world, the greatest care was taken in selecting, preparing, and setting in perfect position the primary foundation stone of a temple building. Such stones could be massive. All other stones were properly fixed in relation to the cornerstone. Peter’s point was that God laid Jesus Christ Himself as the center and foundation of His kingdom. Every person who is in the kingdom is built upon and in relation to Him.

As the cornerstone, Christ is fully reliable. **Whoever believes in him will not be put to shame.** We have God’s own guarantee that we who rely on His mercy in Christ for salvation will never be put to shame. God has proven His commitment to us in the death of Christ. He has proven His power in the resurrection of Christ. Christ is the rock of our salvation. God will keep His commitments to us in Christ during this life, in final judgment, and for all eternity.

[Verses 7-8] In fact, **the honor is for you who believe.** Peter’s first readers were experiencing various trials and suffering (see 1 Pet. 1:6; 3:14; 4:12-19)—dishonor was coming to them from the world. The time would come, however, for them to receive honor with Christ as His faithful servants. (See 1 Pet. 1:7; Rev. 22:5.) On the other hand, the end for **those who do not believe** will be dramatically different. They are headed toward spiritual destruction.

Psalm 118:22 referred to **the stone that the builders rejected.** The religious leaders of Jesus’ day had responsibility as builders of God’s kingdom, but they rejected Jesus. Their rejection, however, was not the final word. God raised Jesus from the dead and exalted Him. In so doing, God confirmed that this one **has become the cornerstone.** The truth is that all unbelievers are building their lives and personal kingdoms while rejecting the most important stone of all. Again, their judgment regarding Christ’s value is not the final word. God has declared Jesus the cornerstone of His kingdom.

Peter used Isaiah 8:14 to show that for unbelievers, Christ is **a stone of stumbling, and a rock of offense.** Those who **disobey the word** of the gospel are stumbling headlong into judgment and eternal punishment. (See 2 Pet. 3:1-9.) This destruction is not a surprise, since **they were destined** for this. Some interpreters think Peter meant the consequence of disobedience was destined—that disobedience results in stumbling. Other interpreters think “they were destined” means those who disobey were themselves destined to disobey.

Would this interpretation deny people’s personal responsibility to make a real choice for Christ? No. Scripture teaches both that God sovereignly works out His will even through human disobedience and that people are truly responsible for their choices. (See Acts 2:23; 13:46-48.) If Peter did mean the unbeliever’s disobedience was in God’s plan, he was not suggesting unbelievers are less than responsible moral agents.



15 minutes

STUDY THE BIBLE

Notes

1 Peter 2:9-10

⁹ But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. ¹⁰ Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.

READ: 1 Peter 2:9-10 on page 106 of the PSG.

ALTERNATE QUESTION:
What do these verses teach us about the relationship between God and His people?

DISCUSS: Question #4 on page 106 of the PSG: **“What word or phrase from these verses do you resonate with most? Why?”**

Note: Your goal here is to help group members interact with specific portions of these verses that strike them in a meaningful way. Be sure to ask why.

GUIDE: Encourage group members to read the illustration involving the Chilean miners, which starts in the second paragraph from page 107 of the PSG.

Note: Ask volunteers to share what they remember hearing and feeling about the Chilean miner crisis when it occurred—including their reactions when they learned the miners had been rescued.

RECAP: Read aloud the final paragraph on page 107 of the PSG:

Mines are dark places, especially when there seems like no hope of escape. As Christians in today’s culture, we also were once in darkness, but we were called “out of darkness into his marvelous light.” God has made us His priests—“a royal priesthood.” We are His representatives. Therefore, we can do nothing less than offer thanksgiving in our hearts and praise on our lips because of all that He has done.

DISCUSS: Question #5 on page 107 of the PSG: **“How can we work as a group to intentionally praise God and declare His goodness?”**

GUIDE: Refer back to “The Point” for this session: **“As servants of Christ, we are His representatives.”** As time allows, encourage volunteers to share any final thoughts and questions.

1 Peter 2:9-10 Commentary

[Verse 9] The rich terminology and images of the Old Testament continued to guide Peter as he described our priestly position and responsibilities. Peter especially drew from Exodus 19:5-6; Deuteronomy 7:6; and Isaiah 43:20-21. Through Christ, we are **a chosen race**. God chose Abraham and his descendants. He has chosen us as well. (See 1 Pet. 1:1; Eph. 1:4.) We are **a royal priesthood**. We are a “royal” priesthood because we serve the King of an eternal kingdom. When God was about to give the Ten Commandments, He signaled His intent for all His people to be priests before Him: “Now therefore, if you will indeed obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession among all peoples, for all the earth is mine; and you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation” (Ex. 19:5-6).

Of course, Israel did not keep the covenant, but God was determined to fulfill His purpose of having a people who would serve Him as priests. Under the new covenant believers are **a holy nation, a people for his own possession**; God has given us His Spirit so we can fulfill His will in serving Him as priests. God’s will is that we **may proclaim the excellencies** of which He is worthy. Some translations have “the praises.” God’s excellencies and worthiness of praise are seen in that He **called you out of darkness into his marvelous light**. God has brought us as Christians out of darkness into “the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ” (2 Cor. 4:6). “He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son” (Col. 1:13). In that way, we have seen His excellencies and we can declare His praises. We are called and commissioned as priests to proclaim our great God to the world. We are His witnesses. We are also called to proclaim Him to one another as His worshipers.

[Verse 10] God has dramatically changed our status and experience through Christ. When we were unbelievers, we were **not a people** in the sense of having a recognized and right standing in God’s sight. Through Christ we have become **God’s people**. God has committed Himself to us. We have committed ourselves to Him. Though all the people of the world belong to Him and are accountable to Him (see Ex. 19:6; Ps. 24:1; Acts 17:28-29), we are God’s people in a special and wonderful way. Likewise, there was a time when we **had not received mercy**. We deserved judgment for our sin. Apart from Christ, judgment and punishment are exactly what we would have had. Through Christ we **have received mercy** because He bore our sin in our place. (See 1 Pet. 2:24.) We have so much to proclaim! We are authorized as God’s priests to proclaim God and His saving work to one another and to the world.



Read the article “Christ’s Followers: A First-Century Understanding” in the Winter 2017-2018 issue of *Biblical Illustrator*. Two previous *Biblical Illustrator* articles, “Peter’s Epistles: An Overview” (Fall 2016) and “Building Stones and Stone Buildings” (Spring 2011), relate to this lesson and can be purchased, along with other articles for this quarter, at lifeway.com/biblicalillustrator.



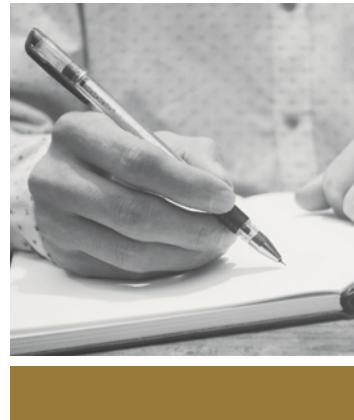
5 minutes

LIVE IT OUT

Notes

GUIDE: Direct group members to page 108 of the PSG. Encourage them to consider taking one of these steps as a way to serve Christ this week as His representative:

- ▶ **Express thanks.** Thank the Lord for saving you and including you in His royal priesthood. Thank Him for empowering you and equipping you to live on mission and in service to Him.
- ▶ **Pray for others.** Interceding for others before God was a part of the priest's duties. Contact family and friends and ask how you can specifically pray for them. Make a prayer list and regularly intercede for others in prayer.
- ▶ **Proclaim Christ.** As a priest, you represent Christ to others. Identify one way you—or your group—"may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light."



Wrap It Up

TRANSITION: Read or restate the final paragraph from page 108 of the PSG:

Following Christ means having a direct line to Almighty God. It also means representing Him through our actions and attitudes. Are you committed to both of those opportunities?

PRAY: Conclude by acknowledging your role as a priest within God's kingdom and as a representative of Christ in your community. Pray that you and your group members will take these roles seriously each day.



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