IF THESE STONES COULD SPEAK

OCT 21-NOV 19
Welcome to *If These Stones Could Speak*...

When gazing up at a centuries-old stone cathedral or walking over the cobblestone paths of an old downtown, you begin to wonder ‘If these stones could speak, what stories would they tell?’ Something similar is true when you think about the history of Mountain. The stones of the church building have witnessed lives changed, leaders developed, missionaries commissioned, marriages restored, and countless other examples of God’s love transforming people. What stories will be told next? How will God’s love be unleashed in our time, through your life?

**Here is how this works:**

**Review**
This first section will focus on reviewing the key point from the message. This should allow time for everyone to get on the same page if they missed the previous week’s message.

**Read**
This section is for deeper study of the Scripture. Each week will have a specific section of Scripture(s) your group will read and study. You will dive into the historical context, the setting, the characters and how all of this impacts the story of God. Is your group looking to go deeper? Here is where you will thrive!

**Reflect**
This section of the study will primarily focus on a reflection of the theme from Scripture and how it speaks into the story of God now. You will have the opportunity to answer some application questions. Questions such as: How does this impact my life? What can we as a group learn from this?

**Reach**
In this final section, your group will have an opportunity to go beyond itself and explore how these Scriptures/themes propel us to reach others. You will have a dedicated time each week to explore ways to reach the community in which you live.
WEEK 1 // Memorial Stones

Review (10 min)

Mountain Christian Church’s history reminds us that God has been unleashing His love through our congregation for almost two hundred years! Joshua directed the Israelites to build a stone memorial at the site of the Jewish nation’s miraculous crossing of the Jordan River to remind them of the wonderful things God had already done. In our own time, memorials remind us of good and bad things from national, regional, or personal history.

- Describe to your group a memorial visit you’ve made that stirred strong emotions in you: Vietnam Veterans Memorial Wall, the Statue of Liberty, 9/11 Memorial, a gravesite of a family member, etc.

Read (5 min)

In the book of Joshua, God’s people, the Israelites, were about to enter the land that God promised to give them. These people were only one generation removed from the people who witnessed the Ten Plagues, crossed the Red Sea, and received the Ten Commandments (events recorded in the book of Exodus). God had proven to these people that He was not finished doing amazing things. In their own lifetime, the twelve tribes of Israel had experienced God miraculously providing food and water for them in the desert, guiding them with the pillar of cloud and fire, and giving them repeated military victories. And now, in Joshua 3, God is about to show his incredible power and faithfulness again.

Read Joshua 3:1-4:7

3 Early in the morning Joshua and all the Israelites set out from Shittim and went to the Jordan, where they camped before crossing over. 2 After three days the officers went throughout the camp, 3 giving orders to the people: “When you see the ark of the covenant of the Lord your God, and the Levitical priests carrying it, you are to move out from your positions and follow it…
Joshua told the people, “Consecrate yourselves, for tomorrow the Lord will do amazing things among you”….

And the Lord said to Joshua, “Today I will begin to exalt you in the eyes of all Israel, so they may know that I am with you as I was with Moses. Tell the priests who carry the ark of the covenant: ‘When you reach the edge of the Jordan’s waters, go and stand in the river.’”

Joshua said to the Israelites, “Come here and listen to the words of the Lord your God. This is how you will know that the living God is among you and that he will certainly drive out before you the Canaanites, Hittites, Hivites, Perizzites, Girgashites, Amorites and Jebusites. See, the ark of the covenant of the Lord of all the earth will go into the Jordan ahead of you. Now then, choose twelve men from the tribes of Israel, one from each tribe. And as soon as the priests who carry the ark of the Lord—the Lord of all the earth—set foot in the Jordan, its waters flowing downstream will be cut off and stand up in a heap.”

So when the people broke camp to cross the Jordan, the priests carrying the ark of the covenant went ahead of them. Now the Jordan is at flood stage all during harvest. Yet as soon as the priests who carried the ark reached the Jordan and their feet touched the water’s edge, the water from upstream stopped flowing. It piled up in a heap a great distance away, at a town called Adam in the vicinity of Zarethan, while the water flowing down to the Sea of the Arabah (that is, the Dead Sea) was completely cut off. So the people crossed over opposite Jericho. The priests who carried the ark of the covenant of the Lord stopped in the middle of the Jordan and stood on dry ground, while all Israel passed by until the whole nation had completed the crossing on dry ground.

When the whole nation had finished crossing the Jordan, the Lord said to Joshua, “Choose twelve men from among the people, one from each tribe, and tell them to take up twelve stones from the middle of the Jordan, from right where the priests are standing, and carry them over with you and put them down at the place where you stay tonight.”

So Joshua called together the twelve men he had appointed from the Israelites, one from each tribe, and said to them, “Go over before the ark of the Lord your God into the middle of the Jordan. Each of you is to take up a stone on his shoulder, according to the number of the tribes of the Israelites, to serve as a sign among you. In the future, when your children ask you, ‘What do these stones mean?’ tell them that the flow of the Jordan was cut off before the ark of the covenant of the Lord. When it crossed the Jordan, the waters of the Jordan were cut off. These stones are to be a memorial to the people of Israel forever.”

Reflect (35 min)
1. Joshua went throughout the camp telling all the people “tomorrow the Lord will do amazing things among you!” Why was Joshua so confident?

2. Talk with your group about a time when you’ve had similar confidence that something amazing was going to happen or you were just sure that God was going to come through.

3. God promised to stop the flow of the river AFTER the priests stepped into it. In other words, they had to “put themselves out there” in obedience and then God would show up in power. Evidence of God’s miraculous action would not come until they had already committed to do what God commanded. Many times, we prefer it to be the other way around: God, do something amazing and guarantee success, and then I’ll obey. If you’re willing, share with your group a time when you’ve had this kind of attitude.

4. Now share with your group an example of when you did what God called you to do, and God did show up as a result, and you saw evidence of His power or blessing or provision.

5. God commanded the Jewish people to build the memorial in Joshua 4 to stir the question, “What do these stones mean?” Why was it so important to have this pile of stones?

6. In what ways have you sought to create “piles of stones” in your own life or with your family--objects, stories, pictures, or anything that can serve as a reminder of God’s faithfulness?

7. If you haven’t already created those “piles of stones”, what are some events in your life that you now recognize should be memorialized? These are likely times when God helped you through a challenging situation, came through in ways you didn’t expect, blessed in uncommon ways--moments that you don’t want to forget and that you want to serve as a testimony to others that God is real and God is faithful? Or think about this question like the writer of Psalm 118, who said, “The Lord has done this, and it is marvelous in our eyes” (v.23). What has God done that you’ve considered “marvelous”?

8. Talk about how reflecting on these events from the past has shaped or can shape your outlook toward the future, particularly when you’re facing a challenge or a crisis.
The New Testament writer, Paul, reminds us that the church is much more than a building, no matter how beautiful or historic or well-constructed. The church is the people of God, unleashing His love to each other and those around them. Paul pictures all of Jesus’ followers as a collection of stones being built together with Jesus as our cornerstone. He writes in Ephesians 2:19-22:

“Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow citizens with God’s people and members of God’s household, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone. In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit.”

9. What has God used to be “building blocks” in your faith?

10. These verses talk about how we have gone from “foreigners” to “fellow citizens” because of what Christ has done for us. Talk with your group about your experience in being welcomed as a “fellow citizen” in Mountain Christian Church. How were you welcomed into the Mountain family?

11. Talk with your group about how you can welcome others into your group and/or into the life of the church.

Reach (5 min)

Memorialize something this week. Pick a moment from your past where you saw God’s faithfulness, and find a way to memorialize it in a tangible way, so that “it will serve as a sign among you.” For God’s people in the book of Joshua, that meant stacking a pile of stones. It might mean the same thing for you. Or maybe you’ll print a picture, make some jewelry, create a journal entry, hang a piece of art on your wall, construct a project, build a cross, dedicate a space—do something that will help you remember and will allow you to answer when people ask “what does this mean?”

Reflect each day on what this memorial means and how God was faithful to you, and make time to thank Him. Be ready to tell the story of God’s faithfulness when people ask you what it means.
Review (10 min)

Sticks and Stones may break my bones, but words can never hurt me… You might remember singing this riddle on the playground as a little one. However, as we grow, these words tend to fade from being a fun little song, to a painful misconception – Words do hurt. Perhaps they hurt just as much, if not more, than stones.
Can you recall a time in which words have affected you, either in the positive or negative? Now image being caught in a shameful moment while stones are being clenched, ready to be hurled, and hateful words are being spewed your way. Riddles to boost self-confidence won’t come in handy. Rather, embarrassment, anger, shame, and regret flood the mind as tears are painfully wept.

Read (5 min)

Open to John 8:1-11

But Jesus went to the Mount of Olives. At dawn he appeared again in the temple courts, where all the people gathered around him, and he sat down to teach them. The teachers of the law and the Pharisees brought in a woman caught in adultery. They made her stand before the group and said to Jesus, “Teacher, this woman was caught in the act of adultery. In the Law Moses commanded us to stone such women. Now what do you say?” They were using this question as a trap, in order to have a basis for accusing him.

But Jesus bent down and started to write on the ground with his finger. When they kept on questioning him, he straightened up and said to them, “Let any one of you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her.” Again he stooped down and wrote on the ground.

At this, those who heard began to go away one at a time, the older ones first, until only Jesus was left, with the woman still standing there. Jesus straightened up and asked her, “Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?”
“No one, sir,” she said.

“Then neither do I condemn you,” Jesus declared. “Go now and leave your life of sin.”

Reflect (40 min)

1. The culture of First Century Palestine is very different from our culture today. The Jewish people held tightly to the Law of Moses and were set apart from their Greco-Roman neighbors’ pagan lifestyle. Talk about a time when you either experienced someone holding tightly to a rule or law.

2. Furthermore, in ancient times, especially the Greco-Roman time, your reputation was everything. Thus, for Jesus to risk his reputation on an adulterous woman, would be “career suicide.” They wanted to trap him. Discuss as a group, if you have had a time where your reputation was ever on the line. Have you ever trapped anyone to ruin their reputation or called someone’s reputation into question?

3. Spend some time talking about the ways in which you can relate to the different people in this story:
   a. The woman - caught red-handed, ashamed, experienced the grace of Jesus
   b. The Pharisees - self-righteous, judgmental, ready to condemn, and then convicted
   c. Jesus - forgiving (“Then neither do I condemn you”) AND truthful (“Let the one without sin cast the first stone,” and “Go and leave your life of sin”).

4. Jesus responds “let any of you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her”. Jesus responds with incredible precision here. He plays on the Pharisees rigidness. It is like he is saying, “if you want to be so rigid, cast that first stone because if you do, I’ll assume you are perfect.” At whom are you most likely to “cast stones” (certain individuals or “types” or groups of people)? What would Jesus say to you the next time you want to cast a stone?

Jesus was the only one who could have thrown a stone if he wanted to. While men clung to their stones with the posture of power and judgment, the Prince of Peace let his stone fall. Jesus let his stone fall for all of us by going to the cross to break the violent cycle of perpetual stone throwing. It’s so easy for us to get caught up in casting stones on the unrighteous, and too often our stones are our words.
5. Reflect on ways you’ve judged someone. What was your posture like? (a posture of pride, misunderstanding, ignorance, etc.)

6. Maybe today you feel like the women. Broken, beat up, knowing you have made some mistakes and you’ve been scarred from someone’s stone throwing. What steps do you need to take to receive the grace of Jesus today?

7. The last thing Jesus says to the woman is, “Then neither do I condemn you, go now and leave your life of sin.” Talk as a group about someone in your life who needs to hear these empowering words. A child? A parent? A sibling or other family member? Your boss, co-worker, employee? A stranger?

Reach (5 min)

Just as a church building can be constructed with beautiful, timeless stone, may the universal Church be constructed with the beautiful, encouraging words we share with each other. Instead of casting our stones, how about we use them to build something beautiful! This week be challenged to take action with your stone! Look for an opportunity to use your words, actions or prayers to build something up. Maybe it is a prayer or conversation...

- To forgive and release someone from guilt
- To strengthen our marriages
- To uplift our children
- To inspire and mentor a friend
- To encourage a co-worker
- To give hope to someone who is standing shamefully in the line of someone else’s fire
WEEK 3 // Unlikely Stones

Reflect (10 min)

Whether it’s Rocky Balboa vs Apollo Creed or Frodo and Sam overcoming Sauron in *Lord of the Rings*, everybody loves an underdog story. Tales of an unheralded athlete or unlikely character pulling off an upset resonate with people across the world—inpiring the unlikeliest of people to attempt the same astonishing feats.

- What’s your favorite underdog story, be it real or fictional?
- Can you think of a time when the odds weren’t in your favor? Share about a time when you faced great adversity, when you stepped into a challenge that you weren’t prepared or qualified to confront.

Read (10 min)

1 Samuel 17 introduces us to one of the greatest underdog stories ever told. It’s a story of insurmountable opposition, high stakes, unlikely characters, and surprising victory for the people of God through the courage of an unlikely hero. Imagine the scene…The fledgling kingdom of Israel, led by King Saul, is being threatened by the Philistines, seafaring people originally from the island of Crete who had moved to Palestine and settled along the coast. While King Saul’s army clustered in the mountains, keeping their distance from the dangerous and battle-tested Philistine army, the Philistines began moving inland toward the valley of Elah, at the base of the mountains where the Israelite army waited in fear. The Philistines’ intent? To capture the mountain ridge near Bethlehem, in turn dividing the kingdom ruled by Saul and overpowering God’s people.

The Philistines set up camp along the southern ridge of the valley of Elah, the Israelites along the northern ridge, leaving the two armies looking across the ravine at each other. Neither dared to move. To attack meant descending the hill and then making a suicidal climb up the enemy’s ridge on the other side. Finally, the Philistines had enough waiting. To avoid heavy bloodshed, they sent their greatest warrior down into the valley to resolve the deadlock through a duel. One man’s victory would be victory for his entire people. Who would go to battle against such opposition?
A champion named Goliath, who was from Gath, came out of the Philistine camp. His height was six cubits and a span. * He had a bronze helmet on his head and wore a coat of scale armor of bronze weighing five thousand shekels; * on his legs he wore bronze greaves, and a bronze javelin was slung on his back. * His spear shaft was like a weaver’s rod, and its iron point weighed six hundred shekels. His shield bearer went ahead of him.

Goliath stood and shouted to the ranks of Israel, “Why do you come out and line up for battle? Am I not a Philistine, and are you not the servants of Saul? Choose a man and have him come down to me. * If he is able to fight and kill me, we will become your subjects; but if I overcome him and kill him, you will become our subjects and serve us.” * Then the Philistine said, “This day I defy the armies of Israel! Give me a man and let us fight each other.” * On hearing the Philistine’s words, Saul and all the Israelites were dismayed and terrified.

Now David was the son of an Ephrathite named Jesse, who was from Bethlehem in Judah. Jesse had eight sons, and in Saul’s time he was very old. * Jesse’s three oldest sons had followed Saul to the war: The firstborn was Eliab; the second, Abinadab; and the third, Shammah. * David was the youngest. The three oldest followed Saul, * but David went back and forth from Saul to tend his father’s sheep at Bethlehem.

For forty days the Philistine came forward every morning and evening and took his stand.

Now Jesse said to his son David, “Take this ephah of roasted grain and these ten loaves of bread for your brothers and hurry to their camp. * Take along these ten cheeses to the commander of their unit. See how your brothers are and bring back some assurance from them. * They are with Saul and all the men of Israel in the Valley of Elah, fighting against the Philistines.”

Early in the morning David left the flock in the care of a shepherd, loaded up and set out, as Jesse had directed. He reached the camp as the army was going out to its battle positions, shouting the war cry. * Israel and the Philistines were drawing up their lines facing each other. * David left his things with the keeper of supplies, ran to the battle lines and asked his brothers how they were. * As he was talking with them, Goliath, the Philistine champion from Gath, stepped out from his lines and shouted his usual defiance, and David heard it. * Whenever the Israelites saw the man, they all fled from him in great fear.
Now the Israelites had been saying, “Do you see how this man keeps coming out? He comes out to defy Israel. The king will give great wealth to the man who kills him. He will also give him his daughter in marriage and will exempt his family from taxes in Israel.”

David asked the men standing near him, “What will be done for the man who kills this Philistine and removes this disgrace from Israel? Who is this uncircumcised Philistine that he should defy the armies of the living God?” They repeated to him what they had been saying and told him, “This is what will be done for the man who kills him.”

When Eliab, David’s oldest brother, heard him speaking with the men, he burned with anger at him and asked, “Why have you come down here? And with whom did you leave those few sheep in the wilderness? I know how conceited you are and how wicked your heart is; you came down only to watch the battle.”

“Now what have I done?” said David. “Can’t I even speak?” He then turned away to someone else and brought up the same matter, and the men answered him as before. What David said was overheard and reported to Saul, and Saul sent for him.

David said to Saul, “Let no one lose heart on account of this Philistine; your servant will go and fight him.” Saul replied, “You are not able to go out against this Philistine and fight him; you are only a young man, and he has been a warrior from his youth.” But David said to Saul, “Your servant has been keeping his father’s sheep. When a lion or a bear came and carried off a sheep from the flock, I went after it, struck it and rescued the sheep from its mouth. When it turned on me, I seized it by its hair, struck it and killed it. Your servant has killed both the lion and the bear; this uncircumcised Philistine will be like one of them, because he has defied the armies of the living God. The Lord who rescued me from the paw of the lion and the paw of the bear will rescue me from the hand of this Philistine.”

Saul said to David, “Go, and the Lord be with you.”

Then Saul dressed David in his own tunic. He put a coat of armor on him and a bronze helmet on his head. David fastened on his sword over the tunic and tried walking around, because he was not used to them. “I cannot go in these,” he said to Saul, “because I am not used to them.” So he took them off. Then he took his staff in his hand, chose five smooth stones from the stream, put them in the pouch of his shepherd’s bag and, with his sling in his hand, approached the Philistine.

Meanwhile, the Philistine, with his shield bearer in front of him, kept coming closer to David. He looked David over and saw that he was little more than a boy, glowing with health and handsome, and he despised him. “He said to David, “Am I
a dog, that you come at me with sticks?” And the Philistine cursed David by his gods. ““Come here,” he said, “and I'll give your flesh to the birds and the wild animals!”

45 David said to the Philistine, “You come against me with sword and spear and javelin, but I come against you in the name of the Lord Almighty, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have defied. “This day the Lord will deliver you into my hands, and I'll strike you down and cut off your head. This very day I will give the carcasses of the Philistine army to the birds and the wild animals, and the whole world will know that there is a God in Israel. “All those gathered here will know that it is not by sword or spear that the Lord saves; for the battle is the Lord’s, and he will give all of you into our hands.”

48 As the Philistine moved closer to attack him, David ran quickly toward the battle line to meet him. “Reaching into his bag and taking out a stone, he slung it and struck the Philistine on the forehead. The stone sank into his forehead, and he fell face down on the ground.

50 So David triumphed over the Philistine with a sling and a stone; without a sword in his hand he struck down the Philistine and killed him.” David ran and stood over him. He took hold of the Philistine’s sword and drew it from the sheath. After he killed him, he cut off his head with the sword. When the Philistines saw that their hero was dead, they turned and ran.

Reflect (30 min)

1. There have been many portrayals of Goliath throughout the centuries. The bible says he was 9 feet tall and was decked in armor that seemed to be impossible to pierce. He was the embodiment of intimidation and fear. Unfortunately, this fear has evolved into many forms today. It could be unrest in our streets, a tragic diagnosis, a death of a loved one etc. Whatever it is, it is overwhelming and unrelenting. Take some time to share with your group about a Goliath in your life.

2. The story continues with Goliath mocking the Israelites terribly. Bullying or mockery still has its stronghold in our time. Share about a time in which you were mocked or you mocked someone. Describe the feeling afterward, was it even worth it?

3. Enter David, a lowly shepherd from the fields. Verse 22 tells us he leaves his things to greet his brothers and hears of Goliath taunting the Israelites. David then steps up and questions the Israelites courage! He says how can we
keep letting this thing mock us!?! In regards to your life, where do you need the courage of David, and what holds you back from being like David?

4. In verse 33, Saul can't comprehend sending David in to battle the Goliath. How is David going to beat Goliath? It's impossible. He doesn't stand a chance. Discuss among your group if there has ever been a time in your life where you were disregarded like David here. How did you process this moment?

5. In verse 37, Saul says some of the most important words in passage, “Go and the Lord be with you.” He gives David the permission to go and take down Goliath. Maybe you have the same status of Saul, whether you are a CEO or a father/mother. You have authority to send someone to go unleash love. Discuss as a group, who you can green light to take down an obstacle. Who needs to hear a word like this from you?

6. David chose not to wear the king’s armor because it felt cumbersome and unfamiliar. Instead, he faced off against Goliath with a simple sling and five smooth stones, weapons he was skilled at using. What stones—unique gifts and talents—has God placed in your care for the purpose of unleashing?

A shepherd, the lowliest of all professions. A messenger, uninvited into battle. The youngest and scrappiest of eight sons, often disregarded and misunderstood. And yet David was a difference maker in the story of God’s people. Just as God chose his infant son to overpower death, he chooses the unlikeliest of heroes to overpower the darkness of this world. Poverty, slavery, terrorism, racism, indifference, selfishness are no match for God’s people. We are invited to learn our part in God’s redemptive plan for the world by taking a closer look at the story of David and Goliath. David didn’t plan to go into battle against Goliath, but as he witnessed Goliath’s mockery of the Israelites, he was compelled to take action, courageously playing his part to fight the injustice before him.

Reach (5 min)

Goliath went into battle with an arm bearer before him; David went with the Living God. David’s faith in God caused him to look at the giant from a different perspective. Goliath was merely a mortal man defying an all-powerful God. David looked at the battle from God's point of view. If we look at giant problems and impossible situations from God’s perspective, we realize that God will fight for us and with us. When we put things in proper perspective, we see more clearly, and we can
fight more effectively. We are reminded that God has equipped us with the right stones and opportunities to make a difference in this world, both large and small.

What giant does God want you to view from his perspective and take on in His name? Spend the remaining time praying for each other and how you will unleash your stones toward the giants of this world. Commit to taking a step in that direction before meeting again.
Reflect (10 min)

It is no secret that a person’s personality is unique to themselves. Granted, there are tendencies that are similar in some of us. Personality assessments like the Myers Briggs and the Enneagram help us discover those similarities, but ultimately each one has a personality unique to themselves. A personality is defined as a set of individual differences that are affected by the development of an individual, values, attitudes, personal memories and social relationships.

- If we polled two good friends from your family and friends, what would they say is your strongest attribute to your personality? Weakest attribute?

Read (5 min)

It is virtually impossible to reconstruct personalities and character traits from our Scriptures. However, if we were to do it, the apostle Peter would be one of the easiest. Peter was born in Bethsaida, and along with his brother Andrew, they “dropped their nets” and became apostles when Jesus called them. From then on Peter held a leading position in the inner circle of the apostles. He is always mentioned first in the list of the disciples in the New Testament and was, with the brothers James and John, in the most intimate circle of disciples for whom Christ showed a particular preference (the raising of Jarius’ daughter, the transfiguration, the prayer in the garden at Gethsemane). He was always quick to speak and quick to act, and, by many accounts, impetuous. Take a look at these 3 snapshots from Peter’s life.

Open to Matthew 16:13-20

“When Jesus came to the region of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, “Who do people say the Son of Man is?”

“They replied, “Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, Jeremiah or one of the prophets.”
“But what about you?” he asked. “Who do you say I am?”
Simon Peter answered, “You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God.”
Jesus replied, “Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by flesh and blood, but by my Father in heaven. «And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it. »I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.”» Then he ordered his disciples not to tell anyone that he was the Messiah.

Read Acts 2:14-36

14 But Peter, taking his stand with the eleven, raised his voice and declared to them: “Men of Judea and all you who live in Jerusalem, let this be known to you and give heed to my words. 15 For these men are not drunk, as you suppose, for it is only the third hour of the day; 16 but this is what was spoken of through the prophet Joel:
17 ‘And it shall be in the last days,’ God says, ‘That I will pour forth of My Spirit on all mankind; And your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, And your young men shall see visions, And your old men shall dream dreams; 18 Even on My bondslaves, both men and women, I will in those days pour forth of My Spirit And they shall prophesy. 19 ‘And I will grant wonders in the sky above And signs on the earth below, Blood, and fire, and vapor of smoke. 20 ‘The sun will be turned into darkness And the moon into blood, Before the great and glorious day of the Lord shall come. 21 ‘And it shall be that everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.’
22 “Men of Israel, listen to these words: Jesus the Nazarene, a man attested to you by God with miracles and wonders and signs which God performed through Him in your midst, just as you yourselves know— 23 this Man, delivered over by the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God, you nailed to a cross by the hands of godless men and put Him to death. 24 But God raised Him up again, putting an end to the agony of death, since it was impossible for Him to be held in its power. 25 For David says of Him,
‘I saw the Lord always in my presence;
For He is at my right hand, so that I will not be shaken.
26 ‘Therefore my heart was glad and my tongue exulted;
Moreover my flesh also will live in hope;
27 Because You will not abandon my soul to Hades,
Nor allow Your Holy One to undergo decay.
28 ‘You have made known to me the ways of life;
You will make me full of gladness with Your presence.’
29 “Brethren, I may confidently say to you regarding the patriarch David that he both died and was buried, and his tomb is with us to this day. 30 And so, because he was a prophet and knew that God had sworn to him with an oath to seat one of his descendants on his throne,
31 he looked ahead and spoke of the resurrection of the Christ, that He was neither abandoned to Hades, nor did His flesh suffer decay.32 This Jesus God raised up again, to which we are all witnesses.33 Therefore having been exalted to the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, He has poured forth this which you both see and hear. 34 For it was not David who ascended into heaven, but he himself says:
35 “The Lord said to my Lord,
“Sit at My right hand,
36 Until I make Your enemies a footstool for Your feet.””
36 Therefore let all the house of Israel know for certain that God has made Him both Lord and Christ—this Jesus whom you crucified.”

Read 1 Peter 2:4-5

‘And coming to Him as to a living stone which has been rejected by men, but is choice and precious in the sight of God, you also, as living stones, are being built up as a spiritual house for a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.

Reflect (30 min)

Refer back to Matthew 16:13-20
1. The first thing to notice about Peter is that he seemed to be an enthusiastic, impulsive person. He stood out for his assertiveness and self-confidence. He took initiatives; he was quick to anger, but was also never quick to lose heart. Does Peter’s personality remind you of someone in your life? Maybe even you?

2. When Jesus asks, “Who do you say that I am?”, it becomes a major turning point. It is the moment he has been waiting for. He has displayed all his glory in front of his disciples. They even left everything to follow him! Jesus is setting them up for a home run, right? Not quite. They stay silent, except the bold, courageous and even reckless Peter. Discuss with the group about a time when you failed to speak up but you did not.

3. Jesus and Peter’s interaction is the climactic turning point in Matthew. In chapter 1-16, Jesus is working up to this confession. He tirelessly works to paint the picture of what the Kingdom of God is like. In the Sermon on the Mount he moves his audience towards the important ethics of a Christ follower. He performs miracles in order to save those around him. All of it leads up to Chapter 16. Discuss the turning point in your life when it comes to your faith? It could be as small as a couple words someone said to you or as big as a life-changing event.

Refer back to Acts 2:14-36

4. Acts 2 shows us Peter’s “first sermon”. At the celebration of Pentecost, Peter calls people together and delivers a strong sermon highlighting the greatness of Jesus. Peter is acting as Jesus predicted, laying the foundation for the church. His audience is so moved they ask the question of what to do next. He tells them the famous lines of, “Repent and be baptized!” It is said that thousands came to Christ that day and the foundation of the church was born. If applicable, share the story of your baptism with the group? If you haven't been baptized, talk about the first time you heard about Christ.

Refer back to 1st Peter 2:4-5

Peter’s story is inspiring. A loud-mouthed, bold, ragged fisherman becomes one of Jesus’s most famous followers. It is easy to get caught up in Peter’s fame, however let us challenge one another to dig deeper. It’s not for us to seek Peter’s fame, but God wants all of us to, like Peter, become a living stone! Peter did all the little things. He lived out his faith daily. He strived to come alive in Christ. He was never satisfied! We all are living stones and are being built up as a spiritual house! What incredible imagery! As Peter encourages his audience here, he is also encouraging us. We are called to come alive in Christ and that moves us from a stone to a living stone.
5. What kind of “stone” you are in this moment? Have you been living for Christ or are you struggling to come alive? Are you a “living stone” or are you living like a stone--hard and lifeless? Explain.

6. Peter had many highlights, but also many regrettable moments that are recorded in the Bible (e.g. denying that he knew Jesus when Jesus was on trial). He did not let the failures of his past stop him from become the leader and “living stone” that Jesus called him to be. How does past baggage challenge your confidence and ability to be a leader today, and how are you working to overcome it?

7. Establish as a group what the next step is to support each in becoming living stones for Christ. (i.e. serving, giving, praying)

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Reach (5 min)

Being a living stone requires action. We now know from Peter’s story that God doesn’t just call us to acknowledge that Christ is our Savior but it follows up with great action! The apostles were so committed to this action, they sacrificed their lives in order to spread the Gospel. And it spread. Sacrifice is required for all who follow Jesus; that’s what it takes to be a living stone. In what way is God calling you to be a living stone? Is he calling you to serve, give, pray, share your story, speak for him with Peter’s boldness? Share with you group what God is prompting you to do.
Review (10 min)

When there’s a project that needs to be accomplished, which role are you most likely to play? The visionary who excites everyone, the strategist who figures out how to execute, the shot-caller who barks out orders, the support staff who brings everyone coffee or supplies the snacks, the cheerleader who encourages, the delegator, the doer, or the deadbeat that plays on their phone while everyone else works?

Read & Reflect (45 min)

In the book of Nehemiah, God’s people are living in the aftermath of one of the most traumatic events in their history. Their land had been overtaken, their cities were burned, and they were deported to a foreign place. They’re in exile, living as refugees. A significant section of the Old Testament is addressed to people in this time period. Through his prophets, God warned his people that this kind of thing could happen if they continued to live in rebellion, ignoring God and seeking fulfillment in idols of their own making. God’s people insisted on placing their trust in things other than God, and they reaped the consequences. Yet, even after their land is invaded and they’re exiled, God is still there with his people. God’s holy city, Jerusalem, and God’s Temple lie in ruins, but God also speaks through his prophets that his love for his people has not faded, and he desires to restore their relationship with Him and restore them to their land if they would repent and turn to him.

The book of Nehemiah tells part of that restoration story. Some of God’s people are still in exile, some are languishing in the ruins of Jerusalem, and Nehemiah arises to lead his people.

Read Nehemiah Chapter 1
1 The words of Nehemiah son of Hakaliah:

In the month of Kislev in the twentieth year, while I was in the citadel of Susa, Hanani, one of my brothers, came from Judah with some other men, and I questioned them about the Jewish remnant that had survived the exile, and also about Jerusalem.  

They said to me, “Those who survived the exile and are back in the province are in great trouble and disgrace. The wall of Jerusalem is broken down, and its gates have been burned with fire.”

When I heard these things, I sat down and wept. For some days I mourned and fasted and prayed before the God of heaven. Then I said:

“Lord, the God of heaven, the great and awesome God, who keeps his covenant of love with those who love him and keep his commandments, let your ear be attentive and your eyes open to hear the prayer your servant is praying before you day and night for your servants, the people of Israel. I confess the sins we Israelites, including myself and my father’s family, have committed against you. We have acted very wickedly toward you. We have not obeyed the commands, decrees and laws you gave your servant Moses.

“Remember the instruction you gave your servant Moses, saying, ‘If you are unfaithful, I will scatter you among the nations, but if you return to me and obey my commands, then even if your exiled people are at the farthest horizon, I will gather them from there and bring them to the place I have chosen as a dwelling for my Name.’

“They are your servants and your people, whom you redeemed by your great strength and your mighty hand. Lord, let your ear be attentive to the prayer of this your servant and to the prayer of your servants who delight in revering your name. Give your servant success today by granting him favor in the presence of this man.”

I was cupbearer to the king.

1. When Nehemiah heard of the condition of his people and the city of Jerusalem, he “sat down and wept.” What are some realities in our world today that cause similar angst and grief?

2. In his grief, how does Nehemiah respond? (consult verses 5-7)

3. What promise of God does Nehemiah call upon? (consult verse 8-9)

4. Scripture is full of God’s promises, spoken to people who need to hear them! For example, God promises to be present, to forgive, to guide, to provide, to restore broken things, bring good out of bad, redeem, make things new, to name a few. What promises of God are most meaningful to you?
5. Nehemiah, cupbearer to this foreign king, ultimately has a plan to go to the king and ask for permission to return to his land and rebuild his city. But the FIRST thing Nehemiah does is call on God in prayer, confess his sins and the sins of his people, and repent. Why is this a critical place to start, and how have you seen God work through confession and repentance in your own life?

In chapter 2 (read the entire chapter with your group if you’d like), Nehemiah makes his request to the king, and the king blesses him with not only the opportunity to return to Jerusalem, but sends him with an army convoy and letters securing their safety and provision of materials. After arriving and surveying the broken down wall of the city, Nehemiah rallies his people (vv. 17-20):

   17 Then I said to them, “You see the trouble we are in: Jerusalem lies in ruins, and its gates have been burned with fire. Come, let us rebuild the wall of Jerusalem, and we will no longer be in disgrace.”  
   18 I also told them about the gracious hand of my God on me and what the king had said to me. They replied, “Let us start rebuilding.” So they began this good work.  
   19 But when Sanballat the Horonite, Tobiah the Ammonite official and Geshem the Arab heard about it, they mocked and ridiculed us. “What is this you are doing?” they asked. “Are you rebelling against the king?”  
   20 I answered them by saying, “The God of heaven will give us success. We his servants will start rebuilding, but as for you, you have no share in Jerusalem or any claim or historic right to it.”

6. The work to rebuild the wall begins, but there is opposition. Someone named Sanballat (maybe he was grumpy about his name!) tries to stand in the way. Talk with your group about a time you’ve set out to accomplish a noble goal, but faced significant opposition from others. As you think about your story, notice Nehemiah’s response to Sanballat—were you able to have the same confidence?

Chapter 3 of Nehemiah can feel somewhat cumbersome to read. There are several names and references that will sound foreign. But have your group open their bibles or bring up Nehemiah 3 on their phones and read through it together. Don’t worry about butchering the names. Take note of the breadth and diversity of those bought into this rebuilding project.

Read Chapter 3 with your Group
7. Wow! Everyone’s doing their part--priests, rulers, officials, nobles, “regular” guys and gals, temple servants, goldsmiths, merchants, perfumers--well, everyone except the nobles of Tekoa. What did you notice about them? (consult verse 5)

8. Nehemiah tells the story of God’s people taking on a literal stone stacking project. We’ve also learned previously in this study about one of the metaphors for the church as a building of “living stones” being stacked together. Talk with your group about how you’ve seen the church come together to accomplish something awesome on a scale that required everyone to do their part.

Reach (10 min)

One thing is clear: everyone is needed. There is Nehemiah, who receives a call from the Lord and acts on it. There is the king, who supports the mission. There are the many others who commit their hands and their lives to the work--the nobles and the merchants and the perfumers and all the “ordinary” people with day jobs--each with a different background and status, but each with the same call: to give of themselves to rebuild the wall, stone by stone.

So what about you? What part do you play? What time, talent, and/or treasure do you have that can be used for God’s purpose? When the story is told about God’s work being done in our day, do you want to be remembered like the nobles of Tekoa who refused to put their shoulder into the work, or have your name listed among the faithful who did what they had ability to do in the place God assigned them? Talk with your group about some of the ways God is calling you to “add your stones to the wall.”

As you close the time with your group, be encouraged with the account of the wall’s completion in Nehemiah chapter 6. The wall is finished even though the builders are faced with extreme threat to their mission and even their lives. They rely on the Lord’s strength, and together see the mission to the end; the wall is rebuilt stone by stone, and all are amazed at what the Lord has done through such a unique group of people.


15 So the wall was completed on the twenty-fifth of Elul, in fifty-two days.
16 When all our enemies heard about this, all the surrounding nations were afraid and lost their self-confidence, because they realized that this work had been done with the help of our God.
Amen! If the stones of what we build can speak, may they tell the story that our work is only made possible through the help of our God.