

LIVING STONES

1 PETER 2:4-6

Coming to Him (that is, Jesus) as to a living stone, rejected indeed by men, but chosen by God and precious, you also, as living stones, are being built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.

Therefore it is also contained in the Scripture, *“Behold, I lay in Zion a chief cornerstone, elect, precious, and he who believes on Him will by no means be put to shame.”*

Peter writes of the church as *“a spiritual house”* or Temple. Our Lord Jesus overcame death and became a *“living stone.”* You and I and all followers of Jesus are now **a chip off the old block**. We too are *living stones!*

We're alive spiritually and connected to one another.

Jesus Christ is our *“chief cornerstone”* - the lynchpin of this spiritual house. And as we lean on Him, we're linked together. In OT times, the Temple was a physical structure devoted to worship and witness. Today, the Church is a spiritual house that serves a similar purpose.

If you've ever been with me to Israel, you've seen some of the stones that made up the Jewish Temple.

Those stones were strong, and straight, and side-by-side. The Temple of old consisted of *limestone walls* while the Church today is made up of *live-stone walls*.

And God intends for us to be strong and straight and side-by-side. Each of us has a role to play in His Church.

This is why I've always said, **"Don't be off the wall, find your place on the wall!"** Be part of the house Jesus is building! And over the last 40 years, many, many people have responded to that call and become part of God's church here at Calvary Chapel Stone Mountain.

This morning, I'd like to celebrate and recognize all the folks over all the years who've been a stone in this Temple to God. Obviously, I can't mention everyone, but **I'd want to speak of a few in honor of the whole!**

Several weeks ago, the church recognized the forty years that Kathy and I have served CalvaryCSM. We appreciate your love and gratitude. Many of you told me, **"Wow, I can't believe you've pastored the same church for forty years."** *Well, the truth is, I haven't...*

Our church has turned over countless times. Folks come and go. Even pillars in the church get replaced.

Some of you have been fixtures here for a long, long time, *and your longevity comes with its own rewards.* But I see all the comers and goers as part of the rich tapestry that has made Calvary Chapel what it is today.

I love the illustration of a **Tap-Tap**. Our church is a spiritual **Tap-Tap**. On the island of Haiti, a Tap-Tap is the main mode of public transportation. **A Tap-Tap is basically a covered pick-up truck that drives around Port-au-Prince stopping and starting, letting people on and off. You tap on the side when you want to stop.**

A Tap-Tap is colorful and crowded. It's a cross between a carnival bus, a taxi, and a paddy-wagon. All kinds of people are onboard, hanging onto its sides.

And you don't measure the usefulness of a Tap-Tap by counting the people in the seats at any one time.

You watch it travel its route... People *tap-on* here and *tap-off* there. Passengers are always coming and going. *And I've found that the church is like a Tap-Tap!*

At times, you wonder about someone. Did he jump off too early? Did she stay on long enough? But that's not my issue. *Jesus is Lord!* I'm just the Tap-Tap driver.

While people are onboard with me, I love them, and teach them, and seek to move them forward. But the crowd on a Tap-Tap always varies. In a sense, a Haitian Tap-Tap driver serves all of Port-au-Prince. And in the same way, the whole world is a member of my parish.

Just recently, out of the blue, I got an email that read, "Hi Dear Pastor! My name is Janaine and I am a Brazilian missionary in a bush in Madagascar (if you don't know that's an island off the southeastern coast of Africa). I live here with my family working among Bara people. Your sermons encourage me! Thanks for teaching me and helping me grow with Jesus and love this people!" Amazingly, this selfless wife and mother of two young children - a woman I've never met - has tapped on to Calvary Chapel. I found her photo on FB.

And with the spread of our ministry on the radio and the internet, this is happening now more and more.

I view CalvaryCSM as a Temple to God. Jesus is the chief cornerstone on which we all lean, and its living stones are people *at home and abroad, here and online, now and in the past - even now and in the future.* Today, I'd like to talk about a few of these folks.

This week James and I were talking about all the people who've been and are a part of Calvary. And we concluded, "If wealth is measured by the lives we touch and by who touches us; then we're both rich people." What an amazing life this church has given to us.

Let me tell you some stories to illustrate what I mean. What a cast of characters have walked through our doors of this church and become part of our family.

For one, the **Albie** boys were tough customers. They had a rough upbringing. Mom did the best she could, but dad was a truck driver and always on the road.

They both found their way to Calvary Chapel, and God transformed their lives. They were our first ushers.

I'll never forget my Southern Baptist mom visiting Calvary Chapel one Sunday morning and remarking afterwards "Your ushers were nice fellows, but at first, I didn't know if they were going to seat me or rob me."

Their dad, **Roy**, drove a truck for forty years - *never had an accident.* When he retired he came to Calvary Chapel with his sons. He got saved on Christmas Eve.

He'd been a few weeks prior, and we hadn't offered an altar call. Roy came up to me after the service and asked, "How

does a person get saved around here?" I led him in a prayer, and Roy gave his life to Jesus.

Over the next few years, I watched this tough-as-nails trucker become one of the kindest men I ever met.

Early on, it was clear God would use CalvaryCSM for folks who didn't fit in elsewhere. This church has always been a **grace place**. Jesus accepts us just as we are and right where we're at; and that's how He wants us to accept each other. It's all about grace!

Tammy was a stripper in her past life, but she embraced Jesus, and at Calvary Chapel, she began to learn to see herself clothed in His robes of righteousness. She's now a faithful wife and a stay-at-home mom.

Angie was a teenager in our youth group. She sang on the worship team. Everybody loved Angie. When she turned up pregnant, she was sorry for what she did. *Afterward, everybody loved Angie and her baby boy.*

Susan was a Wiccan witch before she came to Calvary. Jesus gloriously saved her, and she married a brother in our church. For a number of years, she served faithfully and sacrificially in our church office.

Mark started coming to Calvary Chapel 28 years ago, *the week he got out of prison*. Here at Calvary, we believe that our God is the God of the second chance.

But Mark is an example of what to do with a second chance. In the years since his release, he's worked hard and succeeded and provided other men of similar backgrounds an opportunity to succeed as well.

I'll never forget **Carrie** Goldsmith's story. She was a new Christian in our church, being tempted with old vices. She was so distraught; she jumped in her car and went for a drive. She ended up in the SM graveyard.

When she pulled in, her car's headlights hit a tombstone. It read, "**Goldsmith.**" It reminded her that the old Carrie Goldsmith was dead and she was new in Christ. **Carrie's story is still an illustration for us all.**

One truth we've learned is that where **God guides He provides.** He knows our needs before we ask...

It reminds me of **Judy**, our first secretary. In those early days, we needed help. It was just me on staff, and things were slipping through the cracks. I needed a church secretary but had no money to hire one.

One day Judy approached me, "**Sandy, I'd love to be your secretary, but I have a problem. You can't pay me. I'm a Canadian citizen and if I draw a salary I'll lose my green card status.**" I looked up to heaven and thanked God. Judy was a wonderful secretary and a great friend.

Let me also tell you about **Don** who came to me one Sunday and said God had laid it on his heart to start *tith-ing*. He'd been reading Malachi and didn't know what it was, but he felt God wanted him to start *tith-ing*.

Suddenly, it hit me, he's talking about **tithing**.

I'm thankful that throughout Calvary's history, without our badgering or begging, God has laid it on many people's hearts to support their church financially.

Rodney was a disenchanting Pentecostal who came to CC because we taught the Bible. The *name it claim it* theology he once believed didn't cure his cancer. The strength he needed he ultimately found in God's Word.

Rodney was an interesting fellow. In planning his funeral, he told me he wanted the hearse to take the long way to the graveyard just so he could tie up some traffic one last time. *BTW, we honored his request.*

On the day he died, Rodney's wife asked me, "Can he come to church one more time before we bury him? He loved the praises of God." I assured her that Rodney was at the feet of Jesus surrounded by God's praise.

But that wasn't enough. She wanted him at church one more time. I told her, "I'm so sorry, but we can't have him lying in state on a Sunday morning. People are coming to church, not a funeral." She pleaded.

Finally, I gave in. I asked her what if we put Rodney in the office? *Our music is loud - he'll be surrounded.*

She agreed. So that Sunday the hearse rolled up before the first service. We put Rodney in the youth pastor's office without telling Pastor Jeff. He had a huge shock that AM when he opened his office door!

Speaking of funerals, I remember **John's**. Shortly after he came to Calvary, we asked him to be an usher. He took it so seriously. It was a huge honor for him.

When he died of a congenital heart defect, his wife Mary Lou, buried him in his usher's shirt. She asked all our ushers

to serve as pallbearers. In my mind's eye, I can still see John in his shirt lying in his casket, and the first three rows filled with men in that same usher shirt.

For the next year or so, being a CC usher was like being a Navy Seal. John made it a badge of honor.

I also remember another funeral. **Segun** was one of the fellows who volunteered to come up on Saturdays and help clean the church. Whenever I spoke to Segun, he usually had a toilet brush and cleaner in his hands.

At the time of his funeral, James stuck his head in my office and said, "You better come look." Our sanctuary was filled with dignitaries. As it turns out, Segun Olubyide was a world-renown chemist. *I had no idea.*

People were here from all over the world to pay their respects. The mayor of Atlanta issued a proclamation.

But to me, Segun was the brother who cleaned our restrooms. What a lesson on humility and servanthood.

Debbie called me on the phone one evening and shouted that her husband was turning blue. She'd just called 911, *but what else could she do?* I told her to go in the front yard and scream for help, *I was on my way...*

At the hospital, I was with Debbie when the doctor announced that her newlywed husband, 32 years old, was dead. Deb and I cried a lot together that day...

But as the Bible says, "weeping may endure for a night, but joy comes in the morning." God can make all things new. I heard a great quote just this week. It's from Dr. Seuss no less, "Don't cry because it's over. Smile because it

happened.” Debbie learned to smile again. She met Jim (a brother in our church) and today they’re living happily ever after in another state.

Wayne was a street kid who hung out at the church every afternoon after school - *when he went to school*. For years, this church was the only place he found love.

One Saturday, he and I were cleaning the building when visitors walked in and inquired about the church.

At the time, we weren’t getting many visitors, so I wanted to make a good impression. That’s why I cringed when the man turned to Wayne and asked him, *“Young man, what do you think of the fellowship here?”*

I thought, *“O, no, not Wayne! What’s he going to say!”* He looked the man straight in the eye and said, **“Fellowship? What’s a fellowship. This is my family.”** Wayne’s answer that day still brings tears to my eyes.

Baptisms are special occasions at Calvary Chapel. They’re special celebrations of our new life in Christ.

I’ll never forget one baptism. **Lyngie** was Mr. Tough Guy. His wife said he hadn’t set foot in a church in twelve years. But he’d agreed to come to her baptism.

It was just as I was about to take her under the water that Lyngie jumped into the pool. He was still wearing his shoes and street clothes. With tears streaming down his cheeks, he told me he wanted to be saved.

I baptized *his wife - with her husband* - that day.

Thirty years ago, **Marty** was our rival on the baseball diamond. James and I coached our sons. While Marty coached his son in Little League. Back then, we invited Marty to church once or twice, but he wasn't interested.

Decades later, out of the blue, Marty called. He and James got together. Marty and his wife, Linda, started coming to Calvary. I had the honor of baptizing my former baseball rival. **Now we're on the same team!**

Bob will tell you he was a lost soul before he found Calvary Chapel. He was divorced and alone when he saw an ad in the classified section of the newspaper.

A single sister in our fellowship had ran it - *against my better judgment*. But Bob answered the ad. Pat and Bob's first date was a Sunday service at Calvary Chapel. After two weeks, Bob got saved. Two months later, they were married. In two years, Bob was a deacon, after seven years an elder, after ten a pastor.

Pat is with Jesus now, but Bob still serves faithfully.

Richard and **Billy** were an estranged father and son who hadn't spoken for years. I think it was when Richard left prison, he tried to repair his relationship with his boy. But it was hard. Trust had been broken.

One Sunday, I preached a message that spoke to them both. My text was Malachi 4:6, "(God) will turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the hearts of the children to the fathers." I talked about God's desire to restore relationships, especially of fathers and sons.

That week at our men's retreat, Richard and Billy were there, and they were so eager to show me their matching tattoos. Both of them had gotten [Malachi 4:6](#) tatted on their bicep. I'm usually not a lover of tats, but this one was the most beautiful tattoo I'd ever seen.

I've got to tell you about **Rich**. A fellow I met right after we started Calvary Chapel. He was hitchhiking when I picked him up one Sunday morning and brought him to church. Later that day, he got saved. And he spent the next two weeks sleeping on my living room couch.

When he got his first paycheck, he moved in with a brother in our church. After a few months, he married a young lady who attended. Eventually, they moved back to Rich's home state of Michigan to start a family.

Now fast forward 38 years. Not long ago, I get a phone call from Rich! His wife, Carol, died of cancer, and he asked me to do her funeral. Unfortunately, my schedule prohibited. But since I'd been a part of the beginning of their lives together, he wanted me to be there at the end of their road. I was so honored.

I've got another story. **One day, I walked out to my car in the church parking lot to find that it had been shelled with raw eggs. Somebody had egged my car.**

I immediately started thinking of who it might be...

Where had Pastor James been all day? What did I do to upset the secretaries? Finally, I concluded somebody had gotten mad at the message so they took it out on the messenger. They egged the postman.

On my way home that day, I drove through the carwash to clean off the egg. When I realized it was going to cost me 5 bucks, I started to cop an attitude.

“God, I’m serving you, and it costs me \$5.” At that exact moment, guess who came on the radio? *I did!*

We were running 30-second spots highlighting Jesus’ Beatitudes. And guess which beatitude turned up on that day’s rotation? Matthew 5:10, “Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake... Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven...” I was reminding myself to rejoice over a heavenly reward! I never thought God would allow me to have a radio ministry so *I could minister to me!*

The story though has a happy ending. The egg thrower came forward and apologized. The person still attends our church. I consider the family close friends.

Every time I see **Charlie** I’m reminded he was once our FedEx deliveryman. When he retired, he decided to come to church, and he’s been coming ever since.

A number of you had kids I coached on my baseball team. I was *Coach Sandy* before I was *Pastor Sandy*.

I also have to mention **Steve** and **Charles**. If you had a son at CalvaryCSM in the late 90s to early 2000s, these two men had a profound impact on his life.

Every Wednesday, they’d start in their classroom and eventually move to the ball field. They’d march down the hall.

And you could hear them shout, “*What do you deserve?*” The boys would chant, “**Death and Hell.**”

About that same time, one parent told me they were returning from an outing when one of their sons wanted to stop for an ice cream cone. He said he really *deserved* some ice cream. That’s when his brother piped in, “**No you don’t. You deserve death and hell.**”

And it wasn’t just our boys who had godly influences.

I’ll never forget my daughter returning home from a church spend-the-night party with a strip of her hair dyed bright red. Miss **Cheryl** made all the girls get their parent’s permission. *But my daughter forgot to call.*

We laugh about it **now!** But I am so thankful for Cheryl, and Steve, and Charles, and Carrie, and Mike, and Michelle, and David and the dozens of children’s ministry volunteers who have invested in our kids.

When he was 15, I hired **Joe** to come after school and clean. Joe didn’t have a dad at home and needed a male influence. Our pastors provided him one.

There were days when I’d check on Joe and catch him napping on the chairs in the sanctuary. I figured he needed the sleep. Over the years, Joe learned *how to work, how to be a man, and how to serve the Lord.*

Joe was the first of a chain of young men we’ve hired. JP and Nathan are our current “**Church Joes.**”

And let me mention **Kevin, Zach, Rob, Marvin, David, Chris, Josh, Randy** - and other men who have gone out from our church to pastor and start churches.

Kevin came to me one day and said God had called him to be a pastor. Did I have a job for him? I said, "Sure, show up Monday. You can work at the church, but I'm not going to pay you until you prove yourself."

And low and behold the next Monday he showed up.

He worked for nine months for free; then I put him on part-time - finally, full-time. Kevin was a great blessing to our church. He became a missionary to Ireland, and today, he's a CC senior pastor in Northern California.

David was a corporate executive who wanted to get more involved in our church. I had him teach fifth grade boys Sunday School. I said, "If you can teach fifth grade boys, you can teach anybody." Today, Dave is a great Bible teacher and pastor of CC Chapel Hill, NC.

Zach is my oldest son. As a grade schooler, he loved coming to church with his dad. Once he got there, he climbed on the rooftops of the buildings in Stone Mountain, broke his arm in the church parking lot, and busted out a garage window. *But he grew up loving the church.* Today, Zach pastors Calvary 316 in Winder.

And **Josh**, our former worship leader, has gone on to pastor several Calvary Chapels. Josh is a rising star in our movement, but he'll tell you he learned to work and be a pastor on the back hall here at CalvaryCSM.

And I've got to mention **Andrew**. I baptized his dad. Dedicated him as a baby. Baptized him as a teenager.

Married he and Alli. Now, he's serving as our youth pastor. And we hope his best days are ahead of him. In fact, I think he's gotten over the hump... *the hump!*

In 1980, I handed my pastor, Chuck Smith, a manuscript I wrote entitled, "Welcome to the Family of God" - a booklet for new believers. I asked him to use it for God's glory. Shortly thereafter, I got a phone call from the publishing house saying they were going to print the booklet. I could expect copies in a few weeks.

And I was so excited about that box of booklets. I envisioned my name emblazoned on the cover. *What's more*, I could see all my Bible College friends picking that book off the shelf and checking out my name...

When the box arrived, I cracked it opened, and inspected the booklet. *But my name wasn't on the cover...* "Maybe it's on the back..." *It wasn't.* "At least it's on the title page..." *It wasn't there either.* I looked that booklet over top to bottom - fine print and all - and the words "Sandy Adams" were nowhere to be found.

And immediately the Lord spoke to me, "Sandy, you gave it to Chuck. And he's using it for My glory. *What else did you want?*" It was a wake-up call. What else did I want? *Why was my name being on the booklet so important?*

Today, the names that are most important to me are those of the people I've mentioned this morning as well as the Living Stones who make up our church.

Three days before an election I think it's important to remember how God's Spirit is building God's kingdom.

There are no shortcuts. Jesus is building a spiritual kingdom - one heart at a time. His kingdom is built not by *remaking institutions*, but by *redeeming individuals*.

It's vital you vote, and vote biblically this week. But rather than fret over who occupies the oval office, let's care more about who occupies our neighbor's heart.

What a rich tapestry of people make up the Calvary Chapel family... Five weeks ago you gave me a wonderful gift - *a verse from every book of the Bible in the shape of a thumbprint*. Through my Bible teaching, I've touched your life and left on you my fingerprints.

But your prints are also on me.

Not long ago, I was speaking at a conference, when someone asked me, "Have you ever thought of giving up your church and speaking at conferences full time?"

I laughed, "No way, I love our people, and I enjoy watching God work in their lives week after week. I would miss the day-to-day pastoring of the same people." I guess you could say, I'm just a Tap-Tap driver at heart. I hope you'll come along for the ride!