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## The Sacred Life

### In Pursuit of Holiness, Part 7

*I Peter 2:4-5*

### Discussion Guide

#### Main Idea:

As believers we have a truly sacred life based on a sacred relationship which leads to a sacred response.

#### Discussion Points:

In this passage the Apostle Peter is using a building metaphor. Using this metaphor he refers to Jesus as a “living stone.” This “stone” was rejected by men as they sought to build their own houses but esteemed as a choice and precious stone in God’s sight as He seeks to build His own house. Christians then are also referred to as “living stones” as we make up the spiritual house that God is building with Christ as the cornerstone.

- We see in this verse two views on Jesus. Most men reject Him as worthless and not worthy for building. God esteems Him precious and most worthy. In which category do you find yourself? More bluntly, what is more precious to you than Jesus?
- If we were to poll all of the people in your life what would they say is most precious to you?
- As “living stones” we have been hand crafted by God’s grace to fit into His building into His church. How has God uniquely shaped you for a place in the building? Where and how are you embracing your role in the church? Are you dissatisfied with your “place”? If so, why and what needs to change about your perspective?

In verse 5 we see that as a spiritual house we are a holy priesthood. As this priesthood we are to offer up spiritual sacrifices to God through Jesus. In this sermon we were given 8 different ways that scripture speaks of spiritual sacrifices. These give us pause for some serious examination of our lives.

## **Discussion Guide cont.**

- Read the portion of the transcript that deals with this list and identify those 8 areas. Which of these is especially convicting to you?
- Romans 12 says that our bodies should be a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God. Who does your body rightly belong to? How does this differ from the perspective of the world?
- Our generosity should be a sacrifice. What does someone's generosity say about their heart?
- Our love for others should be a sacrifice. Give some real definition to this in your life. In other words, what does this look like in your church, home, neighborhood, work place, etc.

### **Gospel Connection:**

Christ is the cornerstone in whom the entire building fits together and is held together. Our identity is this "spiritual house" built on Christ. This has serious implications first in our relationship to God and then in our relationship with each other. Our lives are inextricably connected and intertwined because of our union with Christ. That means our sin and our disobedience has consequence for the entire building. It also means that we are responsible for one another. We cannot allow ourselves to disconnect or be unaccountable. We must encourage one another and hold each other responsible for our place in the body. This will require us to leave our individuality behind and embrace our identity as the community of Christ first and foremost.

### **Practical Implications:**

**Think:** We should be challenged in how we esteem of Christ. Is anything more valuable or worthwhile in our minds than Christ Himself? This must change.

**Pray:** Intercede for others as a way of sacrifice. Lay aside your cares and pick up the cares of others.

**Do:** Take the list of spiritual sacrifices and make a real assessment of your willingness to sacrifice in these areas. Is there a place where you are uncomfortable or unwilling? Is there a place where you are lifted up in pride over your "sacrifice"? Confide in someone about this unwillingness or pride and ask for their accountability and help.

# The Sacred Life

## In Pursuit of Holiness, Part 7

*I Peter 2:4-5*

From time to time I come across a news item that literally catches my breath and makes me just sort of moan aloud with surprise and grief.

This past fall, a new abortion clinic was opened in Washington D.C. – called by reporters, a mega-facility. Planned Parenthood celebrated the opening of this new and, perhaps, their most prominent, facility.

That isn't really what caught me by surprise. Frankly, I expect the unbelieving world to defy the Creator and deny the value of life – whether it's a preborn baby or a newborn baby or an elderly person who is encouraged more and more now to end their lives and stop being a burden and a medical expense.

I expect the unbeliever to do whatever they can to make their lives free to live and do whatever they want unencumbered – to remove whatever gets in their self-centered way, even if it's an unborn child.

I expect that kind of decision from those who rebel against the law of God written on their heart.

But what brought me surprise and even more grief regarding this national sin and rebellion against God, were the people involved in this ribbon-cutting ceremony.

The article reads that various religious and church leaders, representing more than 20 different religious groups participated in the opening ceremony.

There was a photograph of them – some standing there in their suits and neckties, some in their church robes and stoles.

The participation of church leaders, by the way, led the CEO of Planned Parenthood for this region to sort of gush with pride and say – quote – “[Their presence] confirms the sacredness of the work we do.” She went on to say, “In almost every message to our staff, I talk about our doing sacred work.” She added, pro-lifers are “trying to separate those of us who support the right of women to choose abortion” – get this – “who choose abortion from a sense of deep spirituality.” (end quote)

So now, aborting a baby is a decision based on deep spirituality.

If you can imagine the religious hypocrisy of this ceremony, the article wrote that just before the ceremony kicked off, all the religious leaders gathered upstairs in this facility for a time of prayer. The prayer was led by a Jewish Rabbi, attended by religious leaders from Protestant denominations and included Hindu Priests and even an Islamic Imam who was skyped into the prayer time. They formed a prayer circle and pledged their support to make, quote, “the world whole and holy”.

Imagine – ending the lives of preborn children now makes the world more holy.

The article wrote that the director of the new facility says she plans to tell patients that the abortion facility is now – quote – “blessed space and those of faith support your decision.”

They ended their pseudo-religious ceremony by singing “This Little Light of Mine”.

Now you know why I moaned out loud.

Mankind's rebellion against the precious sanctity of life revealed in God's word and through God's creation and by God's design – look, religious leader or not – that rebellion has led to tragic perversion and blatant hypocrisy and even more bizarre wordsmithing.

I mean, imagine using words like sacred work and blessed space and deep spirituality and holiness – to describe a place dedicated to nothing less than taking the lives of unborn children.

It reminded me all over again that the human heart is capable of justifying and condoning and supporting and defending whatever it wants to do as it defies God.

In fact, you will be willing to sacrifice anything for the sake of whatever it is you ultimately worship; and if you worship yourself, you will be willing to sacrifice anything that gets in the way of your plans and your will and your way and your career and your life.

But when you come to faith in Jesus Christ and come under the authority of what His word clearly and plainly says – you discover that words like holiness and sacred work and deep spirituality have

entirely different meanings from all the pseudo-religious people smiling in this photograph.

And you also discover that Christianity is about sacrificing life . . . but it isn't someone else's life . . . it's your own life . . . sacrificing *your* life, as a *living* sacrifice, holy and acceptable unto God.

In our last exposition in **First Peter chapter 2**, and I invite you to turn there, the Apostle Peter moved us into the nursery, where newborn infants were seen and heard longing for the pure milk of the word of God.

The Christian's life and growth was illustrated in light of that nursery experience.

Peter now moves us from the nursery to a building site where God the Father, the Building Contractor, is engaged in building into our lives what matters most.

What I want to do is cover the next two verses in this chapter and outline them with just two points that we'll call, a sacred relationship and, secondly, a sacred response.

Peter is actually going to describe for us what it means to live a sacred life – a genuinely holy and deeply spiritual life.

### 1. A Sacred Relationship

Let's pick it up at *First Peter chapter 2, beginning with verse 4. 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 . . . stop there for a minute.*

As Peter changes the illustration from the nursery to a building site, he begins by drawing our attention to the primary feature of the building project – Jesus Christ, the cornerstone – and we'll say more about the cornerstone in our next discussion.

But for now, in fact, before Peter describes the Lord, he gives us the only two reactions the human race has ever given Jesus Christ.

On the one hand, notice he's *rejected by men*, or mankind. Peter is quoting from *Psalms 118:22* where we read the prophetic announcement that the Messiah is the stone the builders rejected.

And the participle Peter uses here for *rejected* refers to someone measuring the stone and sizing up the stone but then deciding it doesn't meet their expectations and so they discard the stone as useless.<sup>i</sup>

Which is a long way of saying “Jesus doesn't measure up.” He isn't what they wanted. “What's Jesus going to do for me? What's He good for?” “I'm not interested.”

For one thing, whenever an unbeliever in any century hears a true representation of the gospel, they discover that Jesus isn't going to ignore their sin. They discover they're actually in grave and eternal danger.

I've delivered the gospel to more people than I can count where at some point, they got the point of why they need saving – and I have lived long enough to be able to discern at that moment when Jesus becomes attractive to them or offensive to them . . . I've watched their faces at that moment when the gospel becomes an confrontation to them which they do not want to hear. Peter is making the point that Jesus isn't an option – He's an intersection. You either turn *to* Him or you're turned *off* by Him. You either *receive* Him or you *reject* Him.

And John the Apostle clearly spelled out the reason why the biblical Jesus turns people off – speaking of Jesus, he writes, and *Light has come into the world and men loved darkness rather than Light, for their deeds were evil. For everyone who does evil hates the Light, and does not come to the Light for fear that his deeds will be exposed. (John 3:19-20)*

Look, the last thing we want is for anybody to turn on the Light! We don't want our sin exposed for what it really is.

Notice again *verse 4. And coming to Him as to a living stone.*

So one response is rejection; but the other response is reception. And the verb Peter uses here for coming to Him is actually a reference, not so much to initial salvation, but to repeated, voluntary, habitual coming to Christ for communion and fellowship and strength.<sup>ii</sup>

It's the same verb the writer of Hebrews uses often in his letter for the believer drawing near to God (*Hebrews 10:22*).

And to Whom are we drawing near? Peter describes Jesus here as a *living stone*.

Stones are not alive. They might be solid, or large or even enduring. But we refer to something being stone dead.

But for Peter, who is the only New Testament author to use this designation for Jesus Christ – this stone is living because this stone is a Person – a Person with life and vitality and strength and consistency and permanency – Jesus is alive!<sup>iii</sup>

One author picks up on the uniqueness of our Living Lord by writing – No other faith can claim a living founder who has passed through death and has risen to a triumph at God the Father’s right hand, and remains continually available to the immediate fellowship of each person who trusts [in] Him.<sup>iv</sup>

Peter goes on here in verse 4 to inform us that God the Father has effectively measured up Jesus Christ too . . . and declares Him to be worthy of His election as Redeemer, chosen before time began.

Peter adds that Jesus Christ is also precious – that is, of the highest value. This is our opinion of Jesus.

In other words, what the world considers worthless and discards, we consider priceless and worthy of all delight.

Now what Peter says next is surprising. He uses the same terminology for the Christian that he just used for Christ.

**Notice, v. 5 . . . You also, as living stones . . .**

It’s interesting that in the New Testament a number of names for Jesus, in the singular, are given to Christians, in the plural:

- He’s the Son of God; we’re sons of God
- He’s the High Priest; we’re priests
- He’s the Lamb; we’re called lambs
- He’s the Light; we’re called lights;
- He’s the Living stone; we’re called here by Peter, living stones.

And the word Peter uses for *stones* isn’t just some random collection of stones lying around on the ground. The word used is a reference to stones that have been dug out of the quarry and then shaped and cut so that they fit the builder’s purposes.

What a great analogy of Christians – we are stones dug out and rescued from the pit of sin and death and then shaped and fashioned by the Divine Builder to suit His divine purposes.

And don’t miss the fact that we too are now called *living stones* – we’ve been given life by union with the Way, the Truth and the Life.

And notice here – we’re not quarried and shaped to simply stand alone; Peter *reinforces the importance of the church, this spiritual house* – into which we’ve been shaped and positioned.

Paul uses the same language of the church under construction as he writes to the Ephesians, *So then you are . . . of God’s household, having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the corner stone, in whom the whole building, being fitted together, is growing into a holy temple in the Lord, in whom you also are being built together into a dwelling of God in the Spirit (Ephesians 2:19-22).*

The church is pictured as a collection of living, redeemed stones, each stone individually quarried and then shaped by God to fit His specific assignment for each of us.

This text reminds me that without the grace of God, none of us would belong to the church; we’d still be in the pit.

But we, believers, have been rescued by grace – and added to the family of God, by the grace of God.

We’re all different, but we have the grace of God in common.

A little girl I read about this past week had memorized *Matthew 22:14* which she then got confused as she quoted it; the text reads, *Many are called, but few are chosen*. She said, “Many are cold, and a few are frozen.” Many are cold and a few are frozen.

Peter is highlighting the fact that we as true believers are all different in personality and talent – we’re not bricks – manufactured to all look alike; by faith in Jesus Christ we are living stones, uniquely fashioned by God’s delight for His service.

And let me add a warning to Christians . . . without submitting to God’s continual shaping and polishing and crafting, none of us will be satisfied with our assignment in the Body of Christ.

Let me add a warning to unbelievers; it occurs to me often, that at some point in human history, this inspired metaphor of a *spiritual building* will one day be completed and that last stone will be rescued from the pit and added to the church – and the building project of the church will be completed.

And this era of human history as we know it will end, and the church will be raptured away to the Father’s House.

Have you yet to believe in the gospel of Jesus Christ? Imagine, you very well might be the last living stone to be added to this spiritual house – the last person to believe – before God the Father says, “The church is complete . . . let’s bring her home.”

Listen, if I knew that you were an unbeliever – and I happened to know that you happened to be the last person God was going to add to the church, listen, I wouldn't let you leave here today until you were saved . . . I mean, you're holding everything up. C'mon!

But in all seriousness, let me warn you and urge you to believe the gospel, repent and come to Christ.

Listen, what if that last person to believe is in China and before noon today, our time, they believe the gospel . . . what if that last person is in Australia or in the Sudan . . . and they are going to believe 5 minutes from now – which means that for you, it is forever too late.

Do you really want to play around with that possibility? Somebody – somebody is going to be the last one to be added to this spiritual house, the living church made up of living stones belonging to the Living Lord.

And if you're here today and you know you don't care for Christ or His word or His church – you're here because your parents made you come; or your wife wants you to come; or your business profile looks better because you come; but there is no desire in your heart to belong to Him and obey Him and worship Him – and you know it in your own heart –

Someone, somewhere on planet earth is going to be the last living stone added to the church . . . I pray it will be you!

Someone will be the last one . . . and I am afraid that it might not be you.

**For those of us who have believed . . . who find in Christ our life and our strength and our hope . . . what's next?**

Do we just sit around and wait for the rapture?

Is this all there is to a sacred life? Oh no . . . we have a sacred relationship . . . but now Peter moves on to describe a sacred response.

## 2. A Sacred Response

Notice *verse 5 again; you also, as living stones, are being built up as a spiritual house* – now notice why – *for a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.*

It's easy for us, 1900 years into this Dispensation of the church to yawn our way through this text and say, "Ok, so what about it?"

But for many of Peter's readers who were old enough to have lived in both the Old Testament and

the New Testament, including Peter himself, this was radical, life altering doctrine.

We call it the individual priesthood of the believer.

In the Old Testament, God's people had a priesthood; but today, God's people are a priesthood.<sup>v</sup>

Even Martin Luther, the converted monk, created a scandal 500 years ago by resurrecting to some degree this doctrine when he wrote that the priesthood of the New Testament is given to the whole Christian community.<sup>vi</sup>

By writing that, He was effectively eliminating any sense of job security . . . he was no longer needed.

Believers can now confess their sins directly to Jesus Christ, the *only mediator between God the Father and mankind (1 Timothy 2:5)*

Peter is describing a stunning privilege to the New Testament believer.

- you can confess your sins immediately
- you can fellowship with God intimately
- you can serve in His immediate presence daily

Here's the stunning implication – especially to these early believers who had waited during that annual sacrifice when the priest went into the Holy of Holies and the presence of God; Peter is effectively telling the church that every believer lives, as it were, inside the Holy of Holies every moment of every day.

Worship is no longer a ritual, but a relationship. It isn't bound to one day, or to one place, but to one Person – the Lord Jesus.

And now, for the Christian, life as a priest can be a life filled with sacred offerings of spiritual sacrifices.

They aren't pigeons and turtle doves and bulls and lambs anymore . . . so, what are they?

**Let me step outside this text and give you 8 of them.**

### 1. First, we can offer to God the sacrifice of our bodies

Paul wrote to the believers living in Rome to offer *their bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God (Romans 12:1)*

Paul described the unbeliever as someone who offers up their bodies to sin and the believer as someone who offers up their bodies to righteousness – or, right *living (Romans 6:13)*.<sup>vii</sup>

## 2. Secondly, we offer to God the sacrifice of praise

*The writer of Hebrews put it this way – let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that give thanks to His name (Hebrews 13:15)*

**3 & 4** The third and fourth sacrifices are in the next verse in

**Hebrews 13:16** which reads, *And do not neglect doing good and sharing, for with such sacrifices, God is pleased.*

**So these are the sacrifices of good deeds and sharing with those in need.**

## 5. Fifth, you can offer to God the sacrifice of financial generosity

It's interesting that Paul commends the church in Philippi for their sacrificial giving. He dips into Old Testament terminology to thank the church for their financial support.

Listen as he writes, *but I rejoiced in the Lord greatly, that now at last you have revived your concern for me; indeed, you were concerned before, but you lacked opportunity . . . you have done well to share with me . . . no church shared with me in the matter of giving and receiving but you alone; I am amply supplied, having received . . . what you have sent, a fragrant aroma, an acceptable sacrifice, well-pleasing to God (Philippians 4:10-19)*. Financial gifts are considered spiritual sacrifices.

Now I'm not the Apostle Paul, but I think this is a great place to pause and commend you as an assembly in this church. We brought to your attention this past December the financial needs and goals of our church – we had around a \$300,000 dollar deficit; we needed for the month of December, of course, our usual monthly budget needs of around \$500,000 dollars and we were also giving over and above toward our building mortgage.

Let me tell you that by the end of December, our normal budget needs of \$500,000 were given; plus, the deficit of \$300,000 dollars was eliminated; plus the church finished our 890 mortgage goal by giving a total, to date, of \$600,000 dollars – which brought the total giving over these past few weeks to 1.4 million dollars. Amen?

Once again, we are amply supplied – by a congregation of priests who offered the sacrifice of generosity.

6. Next, number 6, is a sacrifice most often overlooked – **the sacrifice of converts** – reconciled sinners – to whom you've delivered the gospel and they believed.

Paul wrote that he was *a minister of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles* – the unconverted pagans – so that – get this – *so that my offering of the Gentiles may become acceptable, sanctified by the Holy Spirit (Romans 15:15-16)*

John MacArthur wrote in his commentary on this text that Paul considered the souls of those God had enabled him to influence savingly for Christ as spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God.<sup>viii</sup>

People who had come to faith under his ministry were considered by Paul to be sacrifices acceptable to God.

Have you ever offered to God the sacrifice of some soul you led to Christ? You delivered to them the gospel? You prayed with them as they confessed their belief in Christ as their Savior.

Listen, there isn't any sacrifice unto God like that one.

Maybe you're thinking – but I spend my day chasing a 3 year old around the house. The only unconverted person I see every once in a while is the mailman. I don't know, he might be saved, but he doesn't look like it. Well, first of all – witness to the mailman.

And in the meantime, don't forget you are a witness to 3 year olds . . . who knows what your sacrifice and investment into their lives will one day yield . . . a thousand times over.

## 7. Number 7 is the sacrifice of love.

Paul wrote to the Ephesians that we should imitate Christ and His self-sacrificing love for us as he wrote that *we should walk in love, just as Christ loved us and gave Himself up for us, an offering*

***and a sacrifice to God as a fragrant aroma (Ephesians 5:1-2).***

In other words, the self-sacrificing love of Christ for us was not only a fragrant offering to God the Father, but an example for us to follow.

Whenever you sacrifice *your* interests and *your* plans and *your* needs and *your* will and demonstrate selfless love toward another, your love is actually and ultimately a fragrant offering to God.

And by the way, God may be the only one who notices it, but in the end, He's the only one whose commendation will matter.

**8. Finally, number 8, is the sacrifice of intercession – prayer for others**

Prayer is often overlooked or undervalued as a spiritual sacrifice to God. It is often viewed as something less than good deeds or true sacrifice or front line service.

We have little idea how God hears, records, appreciates, rewards, orchestrates, designs or responds to our prayers.

It's interesting that in the vision of John the Apostle, as he wrote his final letter we call the Book of Revelation; John wrote that he saw prayers becoming physically manifest; John saw them rising up to the very presence of God (***Revelation 8:3-4***)<sup>ix</sup>

But the Apostles and the early church magnified their importance while we today so often minimize them.

As priests, we are to offer this sacrifice at all times – knowing they are heard and received by our Heavenly Father.

The Washington Post carried the story of a woman by the name of Emma Daniel Gray who died just a few years ago. Each night, for 24 years, Emma Gray cleaned the White House.

She took pride in doing her work well, diligent about her business. Her official title was Charwoman, a title that dated back to the 16<sup>th</sup> century for housemaids. The word – char – from Old English becomes the word used for chore – she was literally, a Chorewoman.

Emma Gray traveled each day by public transportation from her northeast Washington home to the residence of the most powerful people in the world. She would serve, behind the scenes, in the white house from 1943 until her retirement in 1979.

In her first decade of service, she was assigned to what is called the Government Accountability

Office, but in 1955 she was transferred to the White House because of her excellent work habits and attitude.

She and her husband had 7 children, in all. One her daughters would later remark that for her mother, cleaning the White House wasn't just work . . . it was a matter of character.

When Emma died at the age of 95, her pastor eulogized that she not only responded to her environment, but she set the tone for her environment.

What made her life so compelling to me was to read in this Washington Post article that Miss Emma, as she was called, was a committed believer; she wasn't just a hard worker, she was offering her work as a sacrifice to her Lord.

The Washington Post article actually included this telling quality of her life – whenever Miss Emma cleaned the Oval Office, she would pause, cleaning materials in one hand, and with her other hand resting on the president's chair, in the solitude of that office, she prayed for him.

Those who knew her, knew that she was faithfully praying that God would give him wisdom and safety and that his leadership would lead to the blessing of God on his family and on her country.

She would serve 6 presidents during her role as Charwoman.<sup>x</sup>

And I would say, Miss Emma Daniel Gray got it. She saw her life as a priest – standing between God and man; bringing people, as it were, to the attention of God – and offering through her sacrifice of prayer – quiet, faithful intercession for the president of the these United States.

Who knows, but what God orchestrated and accomplished through the presidents of the past, who owed much of their favor and wisdom to the prayer of a Charwoman named Emma Daniel Gray. A woman who understood that life – her life – was a sacred life . . . and there in the oval office she offered the sacrifice of intercession to God.

As you move through this coming week, view life as a priest involved in sacred duty . . . no matter who you are . . . no matter where you've been assigned at the moment . . . continue offering sacred sacrifices to God . . .

- Your physical body
- Gratitude and thanksgiving
- Good deeds
- Sharing with others in need
- Giving financially to the Lord's work



- Self-sacrificing love
- Intercession and prayer for others.

Perhaps later today, think through or talk it over with others what that might look like for you as a New Testament priest.

The truth is, beloved, you'll never know until much later, what God orchestrated and arranged and accomplished as a result of the sacrifices of your life to Him.

You have a sacred relationship with the Lord who rescued you from the quarry of emptiness and hopelessness and sin and death and judgment . . . who shaped you and fashioned you and fitted you into His living church.

And this is your sacred response – the privilege of perpetually offering all these sacrifices to your living Lord and Savior and Redeemer.

This is what it really means to live a deeply spiritual, holy, sacred life.

This manuscript is from a sermon preached on 01/15/2017 by Stephen Davey.

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i D. Edmond Hiebert, 1 Peter (BMH Books, 1984), p. 131

ii Adapted from Hiebert, p. 129

iii Ibid, p. 130

iv Harrison, quoted by Hiebert, p. 130

v Warren W. Wiersbe, 1 Peter: Be Hopeful (David C Cook, 1982), p. 60

vi R.C. Sproul, 1-2 Peter (Crossway, 2011), p. 63

vii Adapted from John MacArthur, 1 Peter (Moody Publishers, 2004), p. 115

viii Ibid p.116

ix These 8 offerings quoted and/or adapted from John MacArthur, pp. 115ff

x Adapted from Patricia Sullivan, "Christian Lady Cleaned for 6 Presidents," The Washington Post (6-21-09)