

Mission Expansion Project Completion

"Like Living Stones"

1 Peter 2:4-10

Mark Vroegop

4 As you come to him, a living stone rejected by men but in the sight of God chosen and precious, 5 you yourselves like living stones are being built up as a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. 6 For it stands in Scripture:

*"Behold, I am laying in Zion a stone,
a cornerstone chosen and precious,
and whoever believes in him will not be put to shame."*

7 So the honor is for you who believe, but for those who do not believe,

*"The stone that the builders rejected
has become the cornerstone,"*

8 and

*"A stone of stumbling,
and a rock of offense."*

They stumble because they disobey the word, as they were destined to do.

9 But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. 10 Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy (1 Peter 2:4-10).

On May 16, 2010, during a Sunday evening Fresh Encounter Prayer Service, we gathered around the perimeter of our new facility, which had been marked out on our gravel parking lot. We prayed in each room of our new facility, and together we sought the face of God. After the Elders broke ground, each person was able to scoop up a portion of that ground to put in vials with a verse on them from 2 Thessalonians 3. The verse said, *"Pray that the Master's Word will simply take off and race through the country to a groundswell of response, just as it did among you."*

That was our prayer – a vision of what God could do on this very property for His glory and the advancement of His kingdom. It was a vision to simply expand our ability to accomplish our mission of "igniting a passion to follow Jesus." From the very beginning this expansion project was simply about expanding our ability to accomplish our mission. We've called this our Mission Expansion Project rather than a name like "Equal Sacrifice, Unequal Giving" or "Brick by Brick," because this project is not complicated. It was designed to give us the space that we need to facilitate the vision that God has given us.

Today, after only two years, we are celebrating the completion of this project, and before we get into our brief treatment of 1 Peter 2, I thought it would be good just to remind all of us how we got here. The historical works of God are important.

A Brief History

College Park Church was birthed twenty-seven years ago, in 1985. A group of Bible-believing churches, the Indiana Fellowship of Regular Baptist Churches, had a vision for planting a church in the northern part of Indianapolis – an area that was showing promise of growth and expansion. At the time, the population of Carmel, Indiana was just over 20,000 people, compared to the current population which exceeds 70,000.

This fellowship of churches called Kimber Kauffman, who was pastoring a church in La Rue, Ohio, to plant this new church. A Bible study was started with ten families, who met at the Holiday Inn, in Casino Room B. God blessed the faithful exposition of the Word and the commitment of these believers to one another, and the church began to grow. It wasn't long until the church outgrew the Holiday Inn and relocated to a nearby warehouse.

In 1986, it was clear that a permanent location was needed for this growing body of believers, and a search began for property. In June, ten acres were purchased at 96th and Towne. Over the years, God miraculously allowed College Park to acquire additional property, leading to our existing 35 acres today.

In 1992, the first sanctuary was built at 96th and Towne, and it could hold about 450 people. We knew that space as Worship2 or the Fellowship Hall. Today it is where the bulk of our offices are. The building cost just under one million dollars and was paid off in three years. By then, College Park was averaging over 1,000 people each Sunday.

After adding church offices and additional classrooms, another sanctuary was built in 1997. It cost just over three million and was paid off a year later. The former sanctuary held about 900 people, and it wasn't long until three services became the norm at College Park. Attendance continued to grow, a great staff team developed, and College Park attendance was consistently at over 2,000 people each Sunday.

Looking back, it is really an amazing story of God's faithfulness. Over a period of twenty years, College Park Church purchased thirty-two acres of property, built five buildings, paid every building off in less than four years, planted two churches, gave a total of \$3.2 million to missions through Christmas offerings, and grew from ten families to over 2,000 people. And like every church, there were seasons of great blessing and seasons of testing and trial. Through it all, God's hand has been upon this church.

My family joined this wonderful body of believers in 2008, and you need to know that when I interviewed for this position, I told the elders that I wouldn't lead a building project for at least five years. But in 2009, it became very apparent that we needed to do something about the facility because it was seriously hindering our ability to accomplish our mission.

We had grown by over 1,000 people in about two years, and the facility was already pressed at so many levels. Those were the days when we asked you to "come early, park far and sit close." We talked about "competitive seating" and the "stairway of doom," and I pleaded with you to park in the gravel, even over-spiritualizing it, telling you that "gravel is godly." The elders realized that our facility challenges were comprehensive and connected, and therefore they laid out a vision for a

\$19 million expansion and renovation project which would be the largest in this church's history. We asked the church family for a minimum of \$12 million in commitments, and you committed almost \$15 million. And, by the way, all of this happened in the midst of the Great Recession.

Here we are in 2012. In the last four years we've grown almost by over eighty percent, from 2,100 to 3,800. To date, you have given over \$11.6 million dollars to this project, and assuming that our giving commitments are fulfilled and our construction costs land on target, we anticipate ending the project with between \$3-4 million in mortgage debt. And we are developing plans as to how we can retire that debt as soon as possible.

Equally amazing is the fact that while all of this was happening, we gave over \$4.5 million to local and global outreach. Recently we completed our annual audit with a firm who works with over 200 churches. They shared with us that our external giving was extraordinary – one of the highest percentages of externally-focused dollars of all the churches that they work with. That has been, and continues to be, a philosophical mooring for us: to be sure that “this is for that.”

From the very beginning, this project was never really about facilities. It was about our ability as a church to discover new and better ways of “igniting a passion to follow Jesus.” It has been a remarkable journey and one that we are just beginning together.

Living Stones

Our text today uses a metaphor that I just love: “living stones.” In fact, this metaphor became the spiritual theme for a new memorial that is in front of the west entrance. I love this concept because it is such a loaded and deeply spiritual term, and I find it fitting for us to meditate on this concept today as we conclude this building project. Notice the important truths in 1 Peter 2:4-10 about God and about us:

1. Jesus is central

It is so basic, but it means everything! The purpose of this place is a person – a real, living and powerful person. We gather in this room not because of religion or because of tradition, as good as those things are. We are here today because of Jesus. It is all about Him.

Verse four begins with a familiar Old Testament phrase that was connected to the gathering of God's people for worship. It is frequently used for drawing near to God, either to hear him speak, for worship, or to offer sacrifices (see Lev. 9:5, Ex. 12:48, Psalm 34:5). But in 1 Peter the imagery shifts from coming to a temple to coming to a person. That is an enormously important shift.

The text describes Him as “a living stone rejected by men but in the sight of God chosen and precious.” Peter, borrowing from the temple worship idea, calls Jesus a “living stone.” In other words, he is the temple. Jesus is the ultimate manifestation of the presence of God. He is the ultimate “God-is-near” moment. He is the divinely ordained interception between the need of the world and the majesty of God. Jesus is the place that man and God meet.

But notice the tragedy. This “living stone” was rejected by men, even though He was chosen and precious to God. We hear John's words in John 1:11 – “he came to his own and his own people did not receive him.” Jesus was rejected. You know the story: the Son of God was crucified by the very people whom he came to save. Yet God raised Him from the dead so that God and man could be reconciled. Jesus became the place where the sin of man and the holiness of God can meet.

So it is not just that we come to Jesus. We come to a crucified, risen, and alive Jesus. We come to the person who makes it possible to be forgiven of our sins, who personally absorbed our punishment, and who changes everything! Jesus is central.

2. The goal is to be like Jesus

Peter continues the metaphor of “living stones” by applying it to all those who are coming to Christ. It is not just that Jesus is a living stone, but all those who name the name of Jesus are living stones as well. This really is a remarkable thing to say. Peter, in effect, is saying that in coming to Jesus, we become what He is. Our identity, our security, our life, and our hope are all rooted in Jesus, and the goal is to become like Him.

Further, this is something we are doing together. Verse five says, “being built up as a spiritual house.” It would be incredible to consider that God does this once, but to think about the fact that He does it through a community of people is simply amazing! This passage is telling us that God is on a mission to build His church – to call His people to be like His son. Every person who has a personal relationship with Jesus is a part of that mission and plan of God. Jesus is what brings us together, and becoming like Jesus is where we are headed.

But it gets even better! All of this is so that we can be “a holy priesthood to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.” Don’t miss this. The goal is worship! The goal is to bring us back into the presence of a holy God. Friends, this is the beauty of eternity: God and man reconciled. And all of heaven, every part of your being, and all of us together will know that as we stand before a holy, majestic, righteous God, the only reason we are there is because of Jesus. He paid our debt. He died for our sins. He brought us to God. He gave us forgiveness. He made it possible to be like Him.

6 For it stands in Scripture:

*“Behold, I am laying in Zion a stone,
a cornerstone chosen and precious,
and whoever believes in him will not be put to shame.”*

7 So the honor is for you who believe, but for those who do not believe,

*“The stone that the builders rejected
has become the cornerstone,”*

8 and

*“A stone of stumbling,
and a rock of offense.”*

They stumble because they disobey the word, as they were destined to do.

This is the goal of God’s church; this is the message of the gospel. This is God’s plan. And if you know Jesus... this is good news!

3. We are marked by mercy

What is amazing about the gospel story is that you know that everything you are, everything about your future, and everything that taken place in your soul is because of the work of another. Jesus paid it all! Everything is because of him! Notice the glorious realities expressed in verse nine:

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

We are people who are forever marked by God's grace, His kindness and His mercy. And while we are celebrating the beauty of all that Jesus is for us, we are constantly reminded of where we would be today without the invasion of mercy through Jesus.

Notice how Peter ends! This is the story of every person who has become a follower of Jesus. This is the story of the gathering of God's people called College Park Church.

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

As the Puritans used to say, "I was bemercied!" What is College Park? It is a gathering of bemercied people. God rescued us from ourselves! And he did it through Jesus.

Together, as living stones, we are being built into a spiritual house. A few months ago two brothers, Joey and Nathan, were baptized together. The image of their baptism was moving to me, but it was the story behind the baptism that really touched me. Joey came to faith in Christ through a Bible Study and a conference while in college. His life was radically transformed by the gospel, and he was so thrilled with his new relationship with Jesus that he called for a family meeting. It took weeks to get everyone together, but when they finally gathered, Joey told them about his new relationship with Jesus. His testimony and the transformation of his life were so compelling that Joey had the privilege of seeing his brother trust Christ as well. They are both a part of this body because they want to grow together into the image and likeness of Jesus. Joey and Nathan are living stones.

Karen came to College Park from a legalistic church background, a place where being real and sharing the gut-level pain of life wasn't allowed. In her own words, she would say that "I was being crushed in the shadow of the steeple of religion." She's in what I've called the "church recovery program." What she found here was more than a building. She said, "I found people who were characterized by dependency upon the Word, applying the gospel message to every facet of life, transparent, genuine, thirsty for righteousness and living with a sense of being rescued by Jesus." She's been a member for six months and finally feels "home." Karen is a living stone.

Grace grew up at College Park. Unfortunately, she started down a path of disobedience and rebellion that broke her parents' hearts and made her own heart seem dark. Grace would tell you: "I was consumed with sin. I had hardened my heart against God and rebelled against His way, selfishly determined to do what I wanted and live a life of sin." When Pastor Don Helton, our Pastor of Student Ministries, met with Grace in her deceived condition, he knew that only God could change her desires, reorient her thinking and bring her back. Well, God got her! Grace repented, and a few months ago, she renewed her relationship with her Savior, professed her faith anew, and was baptized. I will not soon forget the hug she gave Pastor Don when she came out of the water. Grace is a living stone.

Julie has been attending College Park since 2010. She knew she was a believer, but she had been struggling with knowing if she had been truly saved. She would tell you that the idols of her heart have cost her dearly, and it was a devastated relationship that brought Julie to a breaking point. In May of this year she cried out to Jesus "I'm sorry for my ugly heart. I'm sorry for trying to do life on my own. I need your help. I need a Savior." That crisis prayer created the desire for more, so she reached out to a College Park friend, a pastor, and then a counselor for help. Through the help of these three people, Julie is well on her way toward experiencing all of what it means to be a follower of Jesus. She is scheduled to be baptized on July 29, when she will publically declare that her sins are forgiven, the guilt is gone, and that Jesus is her savior – her hope in this life and in the one to come. Julie is a living stone.

"You yourselves, like living stones are being built up as a spiritual house. . . through Jesus Christ."

College Park, this is a very special day, a historic day, in the life of our church. For twenty-seven years, God has been faithful to this church, despite what we really deserve. From its beginnings in 1985 to now, the Lord has been building His church one life-changing moment at a time.

This is the kind of day to rejoice and to reflect. This is the kind of day to mark and remember with the hope and prayer of God's blessing and empowerment in the future. From the planting of this church to today, Jesus has been central.

What makes a church special and impactful are the transformed lives of people who have met the Living Stone, Jesus, and who have themselves become living stones like Jesus.

We have been rescued by Jesus to become like Jesus. The Living Stone has made us living stones in the spiritual house called the church.

To God be the glory. Great things He has done!

© College Park Church

Permissions: You are permitted and encouraged to reproduce this material in any format provided that you do not alter the content in any way and do not charge a fee beyond the cost of reproduction. Please include the following statement on any distributed copy: by Mark Vroegop. © College Park Church - Indianapolis, Indiana. www.yourchurch.com