

## Cornerstones

### Psalm 31:1-8, 21-24

In you, O LORD, I have taken refuge; let me never be put to shame; deliver me in your righteousness. 2 Turn your ear to me, come quickly to my rescue; be my rock of refuge, a strong fortress to save me.

3 Since you are my rock and my fortress, for the sake of your name lead and guide me. 4 Free me from the trap that is set for me, for you are my refuge. 5 Into your hands I commit my spirit; redeem me, O LORD, the God of truth.

6 I hate those who cling to worthless idols; I trust in the LORD. 7 I will be glad and rejoice in your love, for you saw my affliction and knew the anguish of my soul. 8 You have not handed me over to the enemy but have set my feet in a spacious place.

21 Praise be to the LORD, for he showed his wonderful love to me when I was in a besieged city. 22 In my alarm I said, "I am cut off from your sight!" Yet you heard my cry for mercy when I called to you for help.

23 Love the LORD, all his saints! The LORD preserves the faithful, but the proud he pays back in full. 24 Be strong and take heart, all you who hope in the LORD.

### I Peter 2:1-10

1 Therefore, rid yourselves of all malice and all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and slander of every kind. 2 Like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation, 3 now that you have tasted that the Lord is good.

4 As you come to him, the living Stone-- rejected by men but chosen by God and precious to him-- 5 you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.

6 For in Scripture it says: "See, I lay a stone in Zion, a chosen and precious cornerstone, and the one who trusts in him will never be put to shame."

7 Now to you who believe, this stone is precious. But to those who do not believe, "The stone the builders rejected has become the capstone," 8 and, "A stone that causes men to stumble and a rock that makes them fall." They stumble because they disobey the message-- which is also what they were destined for.

9 But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. 10 Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.



Our church has a lot to be proud of. We have a congregation of faithful, dedicated members. We do well at taking care of both friend and stranger, of both the young and old, among us. We have this wonderful building, set on this beautiful hilltop, surrounded by a landscape that makes it easy to look up to God and say, “thank you.” We in this church are blessed.

But there is one thing we don't have. A cornerstone.

I'm a bit jealous, because as I walk around Honesdale, every other church I see has one. A big wide block, just above ground level, that proclaims the year their church building was begun.

Like any of those latecomers downtown have reason to boast!

Petty church rivalries aside, cornerstones are a prominent feature on most any building constructed with the hope that it will stand for many years to come. Look at you'll see cornerstones on banks and schools, on libraries and courthouses and on museums.

Ever wondered why?

In modern practice, normally, a [VIP](#) of the organization, or a local [celebrity](#) or [community leader](#), is invited to conduct the ceremony of figuratively beginning the foundations of the building, with the person's name and official position and the date usually being recorded on the [corner] stone. This person is usually asked to place their hand on the stone or otherwise signify its laying.

Most [cornerstone] ceremonies involve the use of a specially manufactured and engraved [trowel](#) that has a formal use in laying [mortar](#) under the stone. Similarly, a special [hammer](#) is often used to ceremonially tap the stone into place.

Those special foundation stones often have a cavity [or hollow in them] into which is placed a [time capsule](#) containing [newspapers](#) of the day or week of the ceremony plus other [artifacts](#) that are typical of the period of the construction: [Coins](#) of the year may also be placed in the cavity or time capsule.<sup>1</sup>

The roots of this modern architectural practice stretch way back in time. “The cornerstone concept is [an ancient one,] derived from the first stone set in the construction of a masonry foundation. [The placement of the cornerstone is vitally] important, since all other stones will be set in reference to this stone, thus determining the position of the entire edifice.”<sup>2</sup>

The cornerstone serves as a reference point for the rest of the building. The cornerstone determines the building's direction; which way it will face, and whether it will rise straight up, or crooked, whether the building will end up level and sturdy, or leaning and precarious.

Given the importance and the significance of the cornerstone, why isn't there one here in our church?

Maybe there is. Maybe even more than one. Maybe they travel here with us each week. Maybe each one of us has a cornerstone all our own.

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1 Ibid.

2 Wikipedia.com. “Cornerstone.”

What is the cornerstone of your life? What gives you direction, what determines your outlook, what point of reference do you look to to keep yourself level, steady, and stable?

What is your foundation? On what kind of cornerstone are you building your life?

That's a big question, one with lots of possible answers. The competition to be your life's cornerstone is fierce. There are many, many people, and many ideas in this world which would love to say, "Its me."

Few things in life that are more important, have more influence over who you are, who you become. Just like the level, plumb of that first block determines the shape and attitude of whole building, so too the things, the thoughts, the basic, fundamental beliefs which undergird your life determine why and how you live like you do.

You really ought to know what your cornerstone looks like, where it came from, and who put it there.

In the house of a relative of mine this week, I noticed some construction going on. A new cornerstone was being laid. This cornerstone came in the form of a new book by a man named Eckhart Tolle. It's titled, "A New Earth, Awakening to Your Life's Purpose."

The book's cover bore two highly coveted affirmations – first, an 'O' shaped sticker identifying it as one of Oprah's book club picks – a label which guarantees impressive sales, and secondly, a citation advertising that this author's previous work earned the #1 spot on the New York Times bestseller list.

Why all this fuss?

The author, Eckhart Tolle, is described in the book as a “spiritual teacher.” At the core of his teaching, the back page says, “lies the transformation of consciousness, a spiritual awakening that he sees as the next step in human evolution,...a prerequisite not only for personal happiness, but also for the ending of violent conflict on our planet.”<sup>3</sup>

Sounds like profoundly important work, doesn't it? Securing personal happiness and bringing world peace?

I thought so, so I just had to pick it up and read. What I found was incredible.

Let me share just a few of the guiding, foundational, cornerstone ideas that Tolle sets forth in “A New Earth.”

First, in stating the purpose of book, he says, “it is not to add new information or beliefs to your mind or to try to convince you of anything, but to bring about a shift in consciousness, that is to say, to awaken....Only by awakening, he says, can you know the true meaning of that word....a process, he says, which is irreversible.”<sup>4</sup>

Curious to discover whether I was currently asleep or actually awake, I flipped through the pages, looking for bits of this powerful truth on which I could chew.

I found quite a mouthful when I came to this passage, where Tolle describes the foolishness of believing in right and wrong. He says,

<sup>3</sup> Tolle, Eckhart. A New Earth. 315-316.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid. 7.

“There is only one absolute Truth, and all other truths emanate from it. When you find that Truth, your actions will be in alignment with it. Human action can reflect the Truth, or it can reflect illusion. Can the Truth be put into words? Yes, but the words are, of course, not it. They only point to it. The Truth, Tolle says, is inseparable from who you are. Yes, you are the Truth...The very being that you are is Truth. This is what Jesus meant, Tolle says, when Jesus said, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life.”<sup>5</sup>

Wow, I said to myself, and here I've always thought that when Jesus said, “I am...” that Jesus was referring to himself, and not to me.

But I was willing to give it a go. Well, then, I thought, if I am my own truth, how can I know if I'm being good for myself, or bad? Just as I suspected, Tolle had an answer, just a few chapters ahead.

“At some point in their lives, most people become aware that there is not only birth, growth, success, good health, pleasure, and winning, but also loss, failure, sickness, old age, decay, pain, and death. Conventionally these are labeled “good” and “bad,” order and disorder. The “meaning” of people's lives is usually associated with what they term the “good,” but the good is continually threatened by collapse, breakdown, disorder;...the “bad.”

The problem, Tolle says, lies in our thinking.

Thinking, Tolle continues, isolates a situation or event and calls it good or bad, as if it had a separate existence. Through excessive reliance on thinking, he says, reality

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid. 71.

becomes fragmented....the mental labels of “good” and “bad” are ultimately illusory. They always imply a limited perspective and so are true only relatively and temporarily.”<sup>6</sup>

So the key to success, to overcoming what may come to you, Tolle suggests, is to not think about or focus on anything but the present moment. The secret, he says, quoting another philosopher and fellow spiritual teacher, is this, “Don't mind what happens.”<sup>7</sup>

Reading that, I was reminded of what I always considered joking advice about getting through hardship or obstacles. It's a line that goes like this, “This problem is simply a question of mind over matter. If you don't mind, then it just doesn't matter.”

Easier said than done.

I read through much more of Tolle's core principles for awakening to the new earth supposedly right here inside me. At the end, what I found myself facing was a proposal to abandon what has served as my life's foundation, my cornerstone, up to this point. Tolle's approach requires that – that I redefine words like “God” and “spirit,” “good” and “bad,” “heaven” and “earth” - and recast them in an image formed in my likeness, to imagine life as being built on a foundation of me, myself, and I.

According to Tolle, everything in life, from my personal happiness all the way up to world peace - it's all up to me. I can have it all, if only I put myself in the right place of mind and perspective. I can be at peace with all the things, things that I can never

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid. 196.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid. 198.

understand or grasp hold of, if I just wake up – as he defines it. All that is needed, is that I rebuild my life on the precariously thin line of now, of this present moment. All I have to do is to jettison any anchors, any footholds of understanding based in past events, or in future hopes.

According to Tolle's underlying principle, all I have to do is become my own light, my own truth, my own God.

I've got a problem with that. I hope that you do as well.

In our reading from the first letter of Peter, the disciple quotes a verse from Psalm 118:22, where it says, “The stone that the builders rejected has become the chief **cornerstone**.”

The Psalm continues with these words; 23 “This is the LORD's doing; it is marvelous in our eyes. 24 This is the day that the LORD has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it.”

Turns out that Peter wasn't the only one thinking about cornerstones. In the New Testament, there are 5 other places where this same verse is quoted, this surprising fact that the stone which the builders tossed out has now become the most critical part of the foundation, the piece on which the whole building rests.

In each of these six instances, the cornerstone refers to Jesus. Not to his teaching, not to his example, not to his words – but to himself, his person, his being.

([Matthew 21:42](#), [Mark 12:10](#), [Luke 20:17](#), [Acts 4:11](#), [Ephesians 2:20](#) and [1 Peter 2:7](#)).<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

The cornerstone is symbolic of Christ, whom the [Apostle Paul](#) referred to as the "head of the corner" and as the "Chief Cornerstone of the Church" ([Ephesians 2:20](#)).<sup>9</sup>

In his letter to the Ephesians, Paul expands upon what it means for Jesus Christ to serve as the cornerstone, the foundation, the reference point, the starting and ending point of life.

Ephesians 2:13 "But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. 14 For he is our peace; in his flesh he has made [both Jews and Gentiles] into one and has broken down the dividing wall, that is, the hostility between us. 15 He has abolished the law with its commandments and ordinances, that he might create in himself one new humanity in place of the two, thus making peace, 16 and might reconcile both groups to God in one body through the cross, thus putting to death that hostility through it.

17 So he came and proclaimed peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near; 18 for through him both of us have access in one Spirit to the Father.

19 So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are citizens with the saints and also members of the household of God, 20 built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the **cornerstone**.

21 In him the whole structure is joined together and grows into a holy temple in the Lord; 22 in whom you also are built together spiritually into a dwelling place for God.

The cornerstone determines which direction the building will face. By the strength, the steadfastness of the cornerstone the building will either stand or fall.

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

If you have yet to allow Christ to inscribe his name on the cornerstone of your life, I encourage you to do so, before someone else slips in to take ownership of it. You'd want to know on what kind of foundation your house sits before you move into it – how much more important is it to consider the cornerstone of your very soul.

If you already number your years according to the life of Jesus Christ, then you know that we thank God today for the fact that in Jesus Christ, our lives rest not on what we think, but on who came from God to show us the way. You know that we are guided and directed not on thoughtless, abstract principles, but by a person who speaks our language, who walks in our shoes. You know that our strength, our hope, our light comes not from any recently popular book of celebrity endorsed sayings, but rather in the form of a Savior, one who came to die so that we might live.

Christ is the cornerstone who endures through all things. Praise God that, through him, with him, and on him, we may rest secure, in joy and at peace, in Jesus Christ our Lord, forever. Amen.