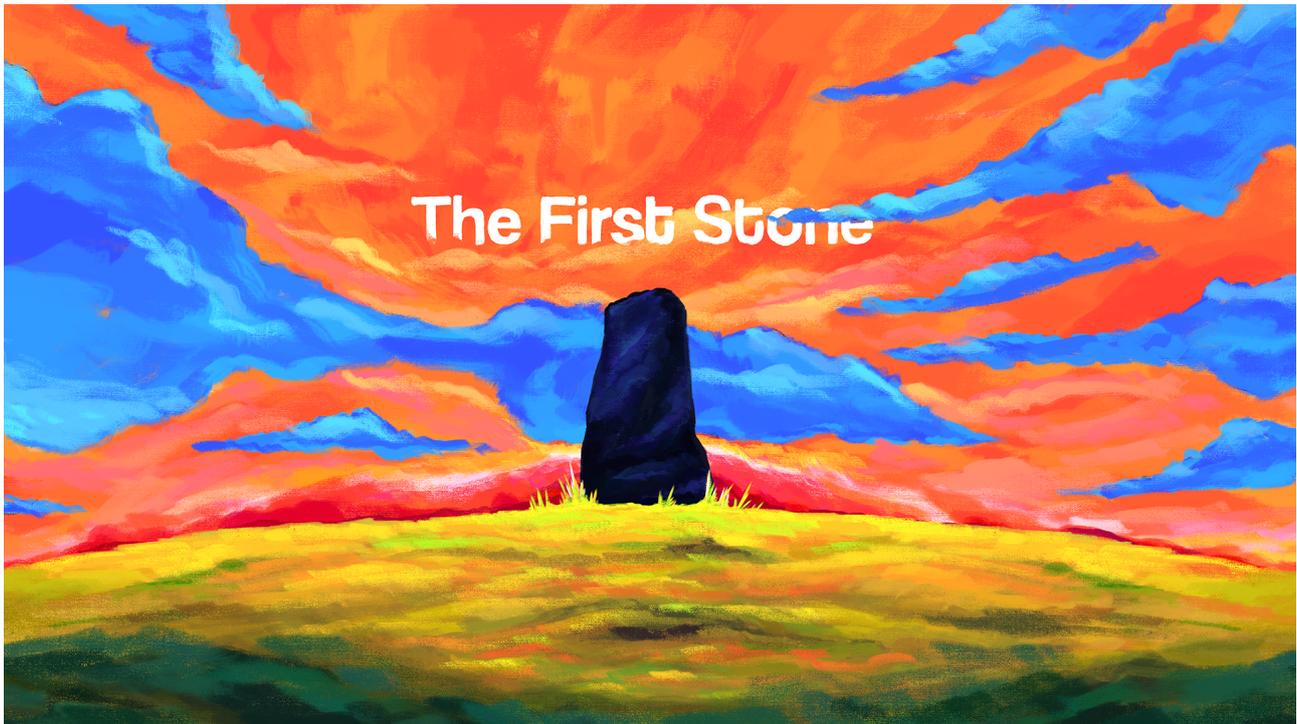


# The First Stone

## STUDY QUESTIONS

### November 2023 (5 November - 2 December)



#### Introduction

This November, as the church year draws to a close, we will be reflecting on the relationship between stone and memory. We will cover geological deep time, ancient standing stones, paperweights, gravestones, precious stones and Jesus — the cornerstone of our faith.

We have entitled the theme *The First Stone*, an English translation of words that came out of Jesus' mouth when religious people were lining up to stone a woman who had sinned big time in their book. Jesus turns the tables on them asking them "Those of you without sin cast the first stone." In recalling this story around a stone we are reminded that stones are used in the Bible to speak of grace and forgiveness, hope and loss, redemption and remembrance.

#### Overview

In week one we start our week thinking about the enduring nature of stone and how it is used in scripture as a metaphor to talk about the enduring grace and love of God. In week two we move from reflecting on the nature of God to considering how human beings have used stone as a marker in time. We raise memorials of stone to remember, people, events and follies, so that we can learn from history and pass on the common good.

In Week three we think of stones as the burdens we bear and the anchors that hold us firm. Finally in week four we recall how stones come in all shapes and sizes and speak to us of faith, hope and love, and our life foundation built on Jesus the cornerstone.

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**SEEDS TO SOW:** Open-ended prompts to inspire creative responses to the themes. Perhaps a song, some drawing, or creative writing! They are short and sweet, simply a starting off place for you and your imagination. Expand, tailor and develop as suits you. Often they take the form of a question, to encourage reflection.

### Format

*These discussion questions adapt our monthly themes for small Connect Groups or personal Bible study (look up [The First Stone Resource Pack](#) for more information on this month's theme). The questions are divided into 4 parts to correspond with the 4 weeks of the Daily Worship theme. They are offered as a guideline and there is no need to go through all the given questions in a single session, or in the following sequence. Feel free to pick and choose, or adapt to what interests you or your group.*

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### Part 1: The Eternal Rock

Our readings this week draw us into the heart and character of God. While we can never fully understand the purposes of God, the scriptures teach us that God has created us out of love and he has the capacity to risk creating a creation in which his love becomes the redeeming birth and completion of his creation. He is the God who shelters us, shields us, inspires us and shapes us.

SEEDS TO SOW: **What does the word 'shield' mean to you?**

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#### Read Isaiah 51: 1-6

What is the difference between the rock and the quarry?

Is there something revealing in this passage about the culture we live in and the faith by which we are shaped?

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#### Read Exodus 33: 12-23

Are there times when God would be too much for us? Times when we begin to understand that God shields us from his power?

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#### Read Psalm 40: 1-3

What effect does sharing a personal testimony of God's provision have on us and also on the person listening? Should we encourage more personal testimonials?

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### Part 2: Stones have meaning — memories carved in our hearts

In week two we move from reflecting on the nature of God to considering how human beings have used stone as a marker in time. We raise memorials of stone to remember, people, events and follies, so that we can learn from history and pass on memories for the common good.

SEEDS TO SOW: **What are the things that really last?**

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**Read Joshua 4: 1-7**

If stones held the ancients' memories — will digital last to hold ours?

Today's stones are perhaps digital files, be they text, film or some other medium but what's interesting is that stone may outlive the digital. Discuss!

What for you is the enduring hope to keep memories alive?

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**Read Isaiah 49: 14-16**

Memory holds our identity — how can we support those whose memory is fading and with it their identity? What has this scripture to say to such a person?

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**Read 1 Samuel 17: 48-50** (*the whole chapter tells the story, so you could read whole thing in advance and then focus on these three verses*)

What metaphorical giants might be laid low by a small act of faith? Discuss.

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### Part 3: Rocks, anchors and burdens

In week three we think of stones as the burdens we bear and the anchors that hold us firm and the hurt we hurl at each other.

**SEEDS TO SOW: There's an interesting tension and interplay between the light yoke (Matthew 11:28-30) and the strong anchor (Hebrews 6:13-20). Reflect on the role of strength but also lightness in our faith.**

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**Read John 8: 3-11**

What are the feelings that are aroused within you when you read this account of Jesus' response to facing an execution?

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**Read Ecclesiastes 3: 5 (verses 1-8 for context)**

What do you think this gathering of stones and throwing stones away means?

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**Read Hebrews 6: 13-20**

In a world of false hopes verse 17 reminds us of the unchangeable promise of God. Discuss why we can hold to it as sure and steadfast?

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### Part 4: Stones that become precious

Finally in week four we recall how stones come in all shapes and sizes and speak to us of faith, hope and love, and our life foundation built on Jesus the cornerstone.

SEEDS TO SOW: **What is truly precious in life?**

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**Read Matthew 16: 13-19**

Discuss how this passage reminds us that God can use ordinary people to do extraordinary things.

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**Read 1 Corinthians 3: 10-15**

So what, to your mind, is this passage saying about the activities we carry out in the name of God?

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**Read Matthew 21: 42-44**

There is a backstory to the cornerstone analogy that Matthew connects with Jesus. Check out Psalm 118: 22-25 and the comments in the daily readings for Sunday 26 November:

*Explore the story of the rejected Cornerstone when building the second temple. It was initially rejected but then used to hold up the south west corner of the outer wall to keep the whole building from sliding down the valley into the rubbish dump known as Gehenna. It was used as a metaphor of God's choice over human choice when building the temple.*

Does this give a new perspective on being rejected?