

What Do These Stones Mean?

In the coming year, we will be telling our stories – stories of faith, stories of struggles, stories of friendship and support, stories that have formed us into the women that we are today. We have much to celebrate and tell!

Thanks to the twelve women who have shared their stories with us in the coming year. In each one, you will see God at work. It is our hope that their stories will encourage you and give you strength. We also hope that in hearing their stories of how God has moved in their lives, that you will tell your stories of faith in the coming year.

Our 2010-2011 Storytellers are:

Jill Carr - Lebanon, MO

Betty Jacob - Broken Bow, OK

Tana Sue Lawson - McDonald, TN

Theresa Martin - Chattanooga, TN

Luz Maria de Montoya - Pereira, Risaralda, Colombia, SA

Carla Sims - Harvest, AL

Beverly St. John - Brentwood, TN

Beverly Stott - Dresden, TN

Cornelia Swain - Memphis, TN

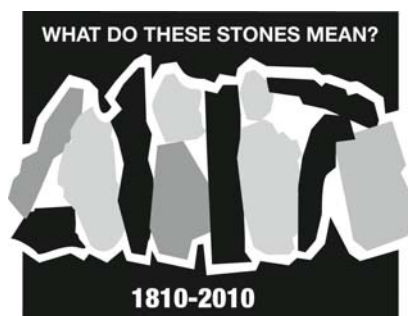
Nona Thomas - Birmingham, AL

Beth (& Boyce) Wallace - Cali, Colombia, SA

Grace Yu-Leung, Jordan, Kowloon, Hong Kong

While she didn't "tell her story" *Jenann Leslie* will help us to explore all of these stories through the **Discussion Questions and Reflection Activities**, the **prayers**, and the **prayer thoughts**. We extend a huge thank you to Jenann for her work in pulling all these individual and unique stories into one study. She is from Marshall, TX and very active in the Discipleship Ministry of the Cumberland Presbyterian Church.

Please feel free to use these resources to fit your interests and needs. You may use them in any order that fits your specific needs. Be sure to check out the Women's Ministry website for more resources (www.cumberland.org/bom > Women's Ministry). This Bible study, along with other resources specific to the yearly theme, is available through the Missions Ministry Team for a nominal charge. You can either call (901/276.9988) or use the **Order Form** included in this packet.



CUMBERLAND PRESBYTERIAN YOUTH CONFERENCE - 1992

Jill Carr - Lebanon, MO



Where I live, we don't have stones – we have rocks. I grew up on a farm and was a tomboy. I know rocks. I played with them and collected them, but rocks are an enemy on a farm. “Picking up rocks” or going to “pick rock” was a dreaded, and seemingly unending, chore. My dad would hook up the tractor and trailer, and we'd go to a field which needed rocks removed. My mom, sisters and I would commence to pulling up rocks from the ground by hand while my dad would use the pick to loosen rock that was just under the surface. When the area was picked clean or the trailer was full, we'd take the load to the rock pile, a pile of rocks in a spot of unusable pasture, and begin the process of unloading all the rocks we'd just loaded. It could be back breaking work - hot, dirty, long, tiring – but necessary. My dad has a system for working a field, and by the time he's done, the ground is perfectly level and the soil is as fine & smooth as silk. The first step is picking up the rocks.

When I read the story of the Israelites crossing the Jordan into the Promised Land, I picture the priests standing in the riverbed, holding the Ark of the Covenant for hours & hours & hours without moving. I picture a sea of people who are anxious, and perhaps tired and hungry too. I hear the noise of animals bleating, mooing, neighing, & grunting. I hear the rustling of trees and grasses. I feel the anticipation. It had to be back breaking work for 2 million people plus livestock to accomplish this one task – hot, dirty, long, tiring – but necessary; necessary to complete their journey; necessary to begin settling their own land; necessary to give Joshua the credibility he needed to lead the Israelite nation; necessary to fulfill the promise God had given.

It is difficult to only choose one stone out of the riverbed (or one rock from the field) to memorialize as significant in my faith journey. I can picture the rock pile from my childhood and the size of it seems much more representative of the many things that have shaped my life. Each rock from that rock pile could be a person, or situation, which honed my thoughts, my attitudes, my actions, and my heart to be more the person God made me to be and continually calls me to be. I choose a rock that, when pulled from the rock pile, creates an avalanche of grace and peace and blessings.

My rock is the Cumberland Presbyterian Youth Conference (CPYC) in 1992 when I served on staff as a member of the worship team. It was a week of making friends with other staff who have since journeyed with me in faith, providing comfort, encouragement, or laughter as needed. It was a week of awakening to God's call on my life, which altered my career path and prioritization of time and resources. It was a week of God speaking to me through the scriptures, not specifically about each one that I read in worship daily, but through them collectively letting me know that God was a power in my life that I couldn't avoid. The changes that ensued were ones that I didn't plan, didn't expect, and didn't quite know how to accept.

My stone story is not one that would captivate most, but it is the pivotal time in my faith journey. I can picture the faces of those who were there. I can hear their voices encouraging me. I can feel the tears on my face as I read scripture in Hull Chapel to a crowd of silenced teens. This is the stone about which I tell my child... as well as all the youth with whom I'm privileged to journey alongside.

Recognizing God's hand during the journey is tricky. Acknowledging God's hand is humbling – but necessary. We must claim it, memorialize it, and tell our children about it. The first step is picking up the rocks.

Discussion Questions and Reflection Activities

Scripture: 1 Cor. 10:4

When we reflect on Jill Carr's message we need to visualize a very rocky terrain much like we have probably envisioned for the Promised Land. Haven't you always wondered how the Israelites ever were able to farm or plant vineyards, etc.? With Jill's help we now know that it is only after many days of back-breaking, diligent work that the ground is ready to grow bountiful crops.

Even so, the Rock on which we build and grow this year may have come only after serious and agonizing meditation and prayer with many mistakes along the way. Our faith journey never proceeds without choosing just the right stone that will yield blessings, grace and peace.

Questions:

When have you had a pivotal spiritual moment that you know changed your life forever?

If church camp is a part of your background, either from the standpoint of being a camper or a leader, what stone was overturned there that led to a new dedication and/or purpose in your life journey?

Are you struggling with some task right now that seems more like "Rock Picking" than a smooth transition in the growth of your circle, congregation, or personal commitment? Spend some time with a friend talking about your "rock picking" journey.

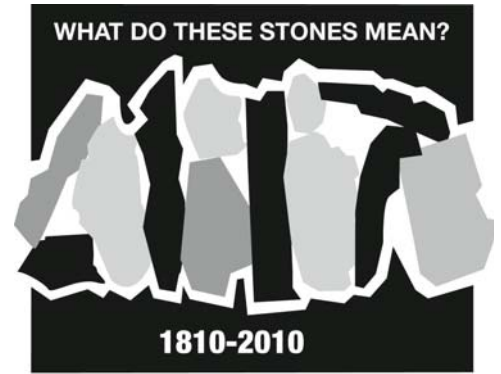
Prayer:

Thank God for the obstacles in your life that turned into blessings. Ask for strength for the journey in whatever phase of your growth you find yourselves. Thank God for this strength and for His grace, blessings and peace.

A CHOCTAW STONE

Betty Jacob – Broken Bow, OK

We are Choctaw American Indians, the first mission of the infant denomination called Cumberland Presbyterian, and we have unique stones of remembrance in our history. We will identify, to those who come after us, those stones that have been God's blessings to us in the past for they are a witness of His stance for us in this age, and in the age to come.



It is important to recall those great and wondrous things that happened to us as we continue our journey to Beulah Land. That was so with the tribes of Israel. God's plan was that they use remembrance stones! The command concerning this was that the stones be taken out of the river where the miracle took place – one stone for each tribe – and tell the story, “when your children ask what these stones mean to you, you will tell them...”

The tribes of Israel were told what to say when the question came, “What do these stones mean?” Their leading from God becomes our leading in this age.

Choctaw American Indians speak from our own stance. Cumberland Presbyterian Choctaw Indians have a witness unique to us, and yet exactly like every other group's story. Our story points to a time and place and blessings that we share with those who rejoice with us, for they have seen the same God in a different way, in a different river.

“Why did this Samuel King and William Moore come to the Akla Ahe Apat Tribe?”

“Why did these Cumberland Presbyterians feel a need to build a school for our people there on the Itombiikbi River?”

“Why did Israel Folsom's mother long for the presence of the Cumberland Presbyterian Church, causing Israel to feel an obligation to re-establish its presence among our people?”

“Mother! What do these stones mean?”

In addition to the vision and work of the mother of Israel Folsom, there are countless Choctaw women who have added to the Cumberland Presbyterian story. These women are stepping stones for our children who will follow our footsteps. The Choctaw Cumberland Presbyterian women are “stones” for not only Choctaw children, but other children of other times and places who walk in the land where they walked. These women will be an encouragement; stones of remembrance. Their lives will be a witness that God has been close to us, is close to us now, and will be always.

The February 4, 1810 stone will be added to the 1818 Samuel King and William Moore stone. We will find other stones that add to our story. Then we shall surely glimpse the glory of the Lord.

Discussion Questions and Reflections Activities

Scripture; Joshua 4:1-9

As Betty Jacob points out, the Choctaw Indian Nation was one of the very first mission outreaches of the early Cumberland Presbyterians. She uses the image of stones being taken out of a *specific* river to celebrate a *specific* happening in Hebrew history. Betty points out that we have all come from different rivers. She uses the tradition of the Choctaws children questioning their elders and mothers about their early beginnings. In this manner, unique traditions will not be lost from generation to generation.

Let each of our Women's Ministry groups be ever mindful from wince our stones come.

This would be a good point in our studies for each women's group to create some kind of memorial containing the "stones" that have helped make us who we are. If you already have a written history make sure that you know where it is and review it. Share it with the rest of the congregation.

Questions :

Has your own family had a tradition of asking the elder members about their past? Share with the group your traditions.

Who is the Historian of the family? of the local church? Who will take their place when they are gone?

How do we respect our history (stones) without worshiping them as the pagans did?

What does the symbolism of the "different rivers" mean to you?

If the rivers merge, do they have to lose their individuality? Talk about what happens when rivers merge – the challenges and the blessings.

As the number of cross-cultural fellowships are added to the CP Church, how will we respect the "different rivers" and yet join together as the Body of Christ?

Prayer:

Take a moment to be thankful for the stones and rivers that God has called together to make the Cumberland Presbyterian Church. Ask for the spirit and courage that guided these in the past to continue to guide our future. Ask for forgiveness for our idol worship

WHAT IS AN “EBENEZER”?

Tana Sue Lawson, McDonald, Tennessee

It was our regularly scheduled Wednesday night choir practice – nothing special, except the people of course! As we practiced a new arrangement of “Come Thou Fount” we began to discuss “just what in the world was an Ebenezer”. We quickly determined it wasn’t Scrooge that was being raised up! But what was it?



So the challenge went out for someone to research this and report back the following week. Kay took the challenge, and we moved on with practice. Mind you, our practices were anything but boring with Kay in attendance. She’s the funniest lady that I’ve ever had the privilege of knowing. She’s the one that I convinced to do a skit for our Women’s Retreat (without telling her there would be over 150 in attendance) and then once she got over her nerves and took the microphone I began to wonder if I would ever regain control!

But then there’s the serious side of Kay as well. The side that would take you on a Bible study that quickly became a journey in itself – she loved to go down rabbit trails and see where you could end up. You see Kay is the one who taught me that when someone comes to mind it’s then that I’m to stop and say a prayer for that person because “that’s holy ground your standing on”. This has proven to be true more times than I can even tell you; and it never ceases to amaze me. When I find out that the person I said a prayer for last month was actually in ICU at the local hospital in serious condition. Or that someone else was going through a very difficult time with family crisis. Sometimes you may get to know why you were allowed the honor of praying for someone and other times you may not.

So, back to Wednesday night choir practice ... as we gathered together the following week Kay was there with the smoothest little stones for each one of us. Of course we had no idea where she was going but were all quite interested to find out just what she was up to this week! And yes, we had forgotten that she had accepted a challenge the previous week. She began to explain that the stone was our “Ebenezer” the stone to remind us just who our Savior is and what amazing things He has done and continues to do for each of us.

She then challenged us: “Keep the stone where you can be continually reminded to give thanks and praise to the One that has given His all.” Mine sits at my desk at work where I can see it every day and where I need most to be reminded to give Him praise. I know one other person who has the stone in their pocket most days so that when they put their hand in the pocket they remember.

In December 2009 Kay was diagnosed with cancer and in January 2010 she had the honor of going home to be with her very personal Lord and Savior. To say I miss her would be the greatest understatement I could make. But to say that she’s a stone along my faith journey – oh yes she is! So in honor of Kay, I leave you this question: ***Where is your Ebenezer?***

Discussion and Reflection Questions

Scripture: 1 Samuel 7: 11-12 and Philippians 3: 13b-14

Tana Sue Lawson takes us on a very personal journey with a very special friend. In this study we met Kay, a very humorous and insightful friend who loved to get to the bottom of little mysteries in life. Keep in mind the stones in Joshua 4: 1-9 that were placed along a pathway that God's people were traveling as a marker and a help.

"Ebenezer" is used as a symbol to remind us of Jesus and all He has done for us. When she presented the choir group with the smooth stone, little did they know that Kay would leave them soon for a better world. The Ebenezer stone represents a new beginning with God's everlasting mercies and a covenant that lasts forever.

Tana Sue also reminds us of the moving of the Spirit in bringing person's names to mind when they are in need of prayer. We should never ignore these nudgings of the Spirit when they come to us at odd times, maybe in the middle of the night.

Questions:

First let's look at Tana Sue's question: " Where is your Ebenezer?"

Do you carry, or keep near, any object that reminds you of Jesus? If so, what is it?
(It does not have to be a stone. It could be a journal.)

Have you ever found yourself awake at night with someone particular on your mind and later found that the person was in need in some way? Did you share this with them or their family? Share your experience with a neighbor.

How do we distinguish between the indwelling of the Spirit and coincidence?

Prayer:

Holy Father, may we always seek to stay near unto you, to listen for your "still small voice". We thank you for those who come into our lives at very special times and who minister to us, or to whom we are guided to be with either in prayer or in person. Use us, Father, in special ways to be stones along others' faith journeys. In Jesus precious name we pray. Amen

A TEXAS-SIZE STONE

Theresa Martin, Chattanooga, Tennessee

How do we remember? We put up memorials - things like statues and signs that hopefully will help those in the present recall activities of those of the past and learn from what they did so that we act faithfully with boldness and courage today.



In California and Canton, China yellow stars were put up as stained glass windows in Cumberland Presbyterian churches.

The one in San Francisco is located in the heart of San Francisco, a big city crowded with businesses and stores on streets that go up hill and down. People of all colors and languages walk these streets – people who speak Chinese, Mandarin, Spanish and English walk these streets. The Cumberland Presbyterian churches in California are serving faithfully. They continue to be thankful for those who enabled them to be what they are today.

I heard about the star in the California church when we attended a presbytery meeting in San Francisco and later the speaker at Presbytery said, “We must be thankful for the women of Texas. Without their efforts, the Cumberland Presbyterian Church would not be alive in California.”

That was a surprise to me. The distance from Texas to California is a long one, and the churches of Texas in pioneer days were certainly not known for being rich or affluent. They had their own struggles. Yet, evidently they had thought about and been concerned about those who needed help outside the borders of their own communities and their state – the great state of Texas. I wanted to know: “Who were these women?”

The stars were placed to call us to remember Ollie Glass Baucom and others like her who were dedicated, faithful and who unselfishly gave their lives away. Ollie was the daughter of Rev. and Mrs. W.S. Glass and a member of the Cumberland Presbyterian Church since her childhood. She married Rev. O. N. Baucom after serving as state organizer for the Texas Women’s Synodical Society. She lived in Texas and organized many women’s missionary societies and worked hard until her death on December 26, 1919.

Rev. W.A. Boone said: “She has done more piecing together . . .of the church . . .than any other one person.” (*History of the Cumberland Presbyterian Church in Texas* by Thomas A. Campbell)

In memory of her faithful, unselfish service, the Texas Women’s Synodical Society placed memorial windows in the San Francisco and Canton mission buildings. The CP Women’s Ministry in the Lubbock, Texas church is still named the Ollie Baucom Circle.

Dedicated – Faithful – Unselfishly gave her life away. Is that how we want to be described and remembered?

Discussion Questions and Reflection Activities

Scripture: Joshua 4: 1-9

Certain people stand out as witnesses in every new work for Christ. They plant, they preach, they nurture, and they encourage. The star on whom Theresa Martin's lesson focuses, is one of those who not only worked diligently in her local church, but whose concern for the spread of the Word of God in the Cumberland Presbyterian Church extended beyond her horizons.

Mrs. Baucom and many others like her, have labored in their local Women's Ministry, and have given of their time and talents in the spread of the gospel as well. While we now have many congregations who make up our Cross-Cultural work, Mrs. Baucom and others embraced one of our early Cross-Cultural churches. Let us be thankful for this "stone" who is remembered as a pioneer in missions, a true star.

Questions:

Who is responsible for the planting of your local congregation?

Do you have a written history of the Women's Ministry of your church? Or a pictorial history? If so, bring it out and share it with participants. If not, discuss how you can go about creating such a historical record.

If you are a new Women's Ministry, do you have a Historian who will faithfully keep a record of your events and ministries? If your group does not have a historian, then you might want to consider adding that officer and discuss together some of the tasks/projects in the coming weeks.

What can you tell your children about these "Stones"?

Do you have a program for assisting with the establishment of new Women's Ministries in your Presbyteries? in any cross-cultural fellowships in your area?

Prayer:

Today let us thank God for his faithful people who have gone before us. May we rededicate ourselves to obtaining a good testimony for the sake of those who will come later.

GOD'S WORD

Luz Maria de Montoya, Pereira, Risaralda, Colombia

When I received Christ in my heart, God awoke in me a love and a desire to study his word. During the process of being discipled and growing spiritually I learned to study the word every day, and I also learned to mark my Bible with the date when God called my attention to a particular text in order to console me, exhort me or remind me of a promise that would sustain my faith.



While thinking on the theme chosen to celebrate the bicentennial of the Cumberland Presbyterian Church: *What do these stones mean?* and bringing it into the context of my faith walk with God and his word, I can truly say that each text, each verse, that I have marked in my Bible with a date (and I've had to change Bibles several times over the years), each of them are texts that have sustained my faith and my hope during times in which I needed to "remember" that God has always been there as my Good Shepherd, helping me and walking with me even in the darkest of valleys.

Those texts that marked in my Bible have been as "stones" that make me remember and celebrate each new evidence of God's constant love and care for me, and my family. They have also strengthened my faith in times of anguish because they remind me that what God has done yesterday, he can also do today – how wonderful! How many stones have we been able to place that help us remember God's wonderful works and thus enable us look toward the future with hope!

These "stones" have been reminders to speak and share with my children of the love and faithfulness of God. I have four, and when, during my second pregnancy I was informed I was carrying triplets, my first thought was to tell God that I accepted his will, but asked only that his care and provision for us would never be lacking. God has been greatly faithful and good, but when in temporary difficulties I turn to my Bible and look for "my stones" so I can talk to my children and remind them of God's provision; I can tell them and show them in my Bible exactly when I marked the words that God has used to speak to me and tell how he has come through for us. For example, I remember when he miraculously moved someone's heart to send us a check to buy shoes, because God told his servant that he watches over the birds of the air and would also watch over his servant's children. The same happened when he consoled me telling me not to worry about money to pay for their university studies, because he would defend my cause and take care of my children. Yes, I am a woman who can tell of God's love and power, and I don't want to ever forget or allow my children to forget. That's why I talk to them and take advantage of every life-lesson or need to show my "stones" to help them "remember" who God is and what it means to be under his grace and mercy.

I want to end this by saying that I sing with the psalmist when in Psalm 119: 49 –50 he says:
Remember your word to your servant, for you have given me hope.
My comfort in my suffering is this: your promise preserves my life.
(Today's New International Version)

Yes, in each word, each promise, God has given me life and I want to write and keep his promises and word as “stones” in my heart so that they may always be with me and remind me of what great love God has shown to me, so that when anyone asks the reason for my hope and faith I, like the children of Israel, can tell and remember the story of his wonderful love and mercy.

Discussion Questions and Reflection Activities

Luz Maria Montoya speaks from a faithful heart as she tells of being true to her resolve to study God's word, always marking the passages with the date when they were read. As she raised her children they were guided by their Mother's testimony. The Scriptures had sustained her during times of anguish and turmoil as well as in times of triumph and happiness.

Questions:

After studying the passage from Joshua 4: 1-9, when have you built a monument to honor God that has endured throughout your lifetime (or that you wish to last a lifetime)?

When in your life have you made a promise to God that has sustained you throughout the good times and the rocky times?

Do you have a favorite story from a parent or grandparent's past that marked a milestone of faith as he or she faced life's river crossings?

Prayer:

Close with a prayer thanking God for his everlasting faithfulness, for caring for us even when we have neglected our promises to him, for strength to do the hard tasks that are set before us, to be able to discern his will for this group who comes together in his name. May God continue to bless you in life's journey.

STONES IN THE POCKETS

Carla Sims, Harvest, Alabama

When my son was little, the laundry was never boring - routine, but certainly not mundane. I quickly learned that the contents of a small boy's pockets and any household appliance are not compatible. Pocket excavation was vital, seeing as I had previously washed and subsequently dried bubble gum, baloney, rocks, "Mighty Max" figures and, yes, a couple of real minnows.



The constant I found during each pocket scavenger hunt was rocks. There was always a stone of some sort in every imaginable pocket in my son's clothing. Curiosity got the best of me so I began asking him about the rocks. It was like playing show and tell in reverse. Sure enough, he could eagerly tell me about each one; where he found it and why he kept it. The more I learned about the stones that fascinated him, the more I learned about my little boy. For instance, one he discovered while running through the woods with his dog. Another stone was uncovered after he jumped out of a swing at the park. A few he dug out of the mud when he was supposed to be listening in an outside Bible school, and several were cool souvenirs from trips. One of my favorites he carved into a cross necklace for me.

As my son has grown older, some stones are now too large or heavy for his pockets. But, whether they are collected in the trunk of his car, baggies, at a gem and mineral show or even in the pockets of a pair of tall blue jeans, each stone has a wonderful story and a reason for keeping it. Our garden, flowerbeds, kitchen window sill and even my jewelry box display meaningful testaments to his life's journey. They tell where he has been and even where he's going. He will begin gemology school in the fall.

So, how can anyone visualize my life's journey with God? Simply check out my heart's pockets; the people, places, things, events and circumstances I choose to keep as vital reminders of where I've been and, perhaps, where I am going. Each stone has a story and I pray is an encouragement to others, testifies to the faith I deeply cherish, causes someone to think or even just have a good belly laugh. Most of all, I want my rock pile to stir the curiosity in everyone enough so that they begin to pilfer through their own stone collection. I promise, the discovery is never boring.

Discussion Questions and Reflection Activities

Scripture: Matthew 13:44

Many of us will be reminded of days gone by when we retrieved the treasures of our sons from pockets, washers, and other places. Others of us are still finding them. How precious these memories are. If the child has not put them in their secret place then perhaps we have them stashed away so they may claim them someday.

These treasures may be as simple as rocks from the driveway. They may not be worth much, only to a child, but some might indeed be very valuable. Our own adventures in Christianity could be rich in gems and treasures as well. Take time to search an old study Bible or Bible study workbook. Reread your musings and written prayers.

Questions:

Do these treasures still have meaning to you? Are you surprised at what you find?
Have you carried out the promises hidden away or are you still waiting for a more opportune time in which you could work on them?

What memories could you share of finding "hidden "treasures"? These could be stories of your children or from your personal life and studies.

Prayer:

Grant us, Father, new eyes to see the treasures contained with your word, in our fellowship with each other, and in your creation. We thank you Father for this bounty, for which you have given us. Forgive us when we wear blinders or become too self-absorbed to notice the wonders you have for us. In Jesus name we pray, Amen

A STONE OF ENCOURAGEMENT

Beverly St. John, Brentwood, TN

In the 1950's I was a young mother of two little girls, a homemaker, and free-lance artist when I received a letter from Miss Virginia Malcom with the Board of Christian Education. Her request read as follows: "We would like to invite you to write an article for a monthly publication for young parents titled "My Baby and His Church." She proceeded to tell me how long it should be, doubled-spaced, etc.



I responded saying, "Thank you, Miss Malcom, but I am a commercial artist – not a writer." She wrote back: "All we know is that you are a devoted mother and active in the Brookhaven Cumberland Presbyterian Church. We thought that you would have some interesting experiences to share with other young parents that might be a source of inspiration for them. We will pay you \$10.00 for each article. Please try to write three."

I thought for a while then borrowed a typewriter, and jotted down the story of the birth of my first child. When she was a few hours old, the nurse came bringing her to me, laid her to my breast and said, "Feed her – she's hungry." I began to think of the many ways that children are always hungry - not only for food, but love, encouragement, and discipline.

With much anxiety I mailed the article to Miss Malcom. She responded with "good job! So I wrote another, and another. There! I had done three, just as she had asked. She wrote again: "We like your work - would you please write three more?" Several months later they changed the title of the leaflet to "The Twigs" and asked if I would make some drawings for the covers – one for each of the four seasons. I was excited! I got out my drawing board and made four drawings. They too were accepted. The short of it is that I continued writing one story a month for six years (even during a move to New Jersey and back!). By that time my "little girls" were almost teenagers and the time had come for me to let someone else tell their stories.

A few years later the Board of Christian Education chose 23 of the articles and published a book titled "As the Twig Is Bent." I was also asked to design the book jacket and do a few illustrations. I was an author! Never did I dream... I even discovered that I enjoyed writing – because of "Miss Virginia" – a wonderful stone in my young life.

Her encouragement taught me that we are called to encourage fellow Christians to discover their talents, and use them for the Kingdom. St. Paul, on several occasions, admonished his followers to use their gifts – whatever they might be, as a means of "growing a church" – the Body of Christ, a church that is founded on living STONES – made up of loving people who are willing to "give it a try!"

I like the story of Michelangelo who was rolling a big slab of marble down the street one day. People along the way yelled: "Mike, what are you going to do with that old rock?" To

which he responded: “There’s an angel in there that is dying to get out.” There are “angels” in all of us dying to get out – they just need a little nudging!

Discussion Questions and Reflection Activities

Scripture: Isaiah 6: 8

Many of us know Beverly St. John as a dynamic leader of both the former Cumberland Presbyterian's Women's work and the first female moderator of our General Assembly (1988). Even one of such stellar reputation must start somewhere to take a leadership role. One of Beverly's first stone was a writing assignment. She used this stone not as a stumbling stone, but as a building block. Just as Beverly found the church to be filled with "Living Stones", we as Women's Ministry members are called to build on the foundation that is already here and to be "Living Stones" for others around us.

Questions:

Who was the first "Living Stone" to come into your life and give you a challenge, which has served to help you become a vital part of the Body? (It may have been in some long ago church or it may be right here where you live and worship now.)

When was the last time that you accepted a challenge to do something that you really considered out of your comfort zone or abilities, but you accepted anyway and was blessed by it, and became a blessing to others?

Just as Michelangelo could see an angel in a rough stone, we too, can see potential in others. Who is the Spirit leading you to encourage? Is it a youth, a family member, or even the person sitting next to you? What are some specific ways that you can bless and encourage them?

Prayer:

Close in prayer, asking God and the Holy Spirit to guide you in your decisions when asked to perform a task, as well as guide you as a "Living Stone" to someone who needs your encouragement to use the gifts God has given them.

A RAINBOW

Beverly Stott, Dresden, Tennessee

What do these stones mean? The answers are as many and varied as the individuals asked. Ultimately they bind us together as Cumberland Presbyterians. Walk with me as I share one of the “stones” in my life.



The USS President Cleveland moved away from the pier into the San Francisco Bay. The journey had begun for us and we watched in awe from the deck of the ship as family and friends grew smaller in size and the colorful streamers connecting us began breaking. Soon we were under the beautiful Golden Gate Bridge and into the wide expanse of the Pacific Ocean. Some two weeks would pass before we arrived in the port of Yokohama, Japan. Thus began the first missionary journey for the Stott family – Buddy, Beverly, Bruce, Kell and Paul.

There was much excitement but also some anxiety and apprehension. Were we truly prepared? We'd done lots of paper work and been thoroughly questioned by the members of the Board of Missions; we'd undergone a psychiatric examination; had three months of language study under a private teacher; packed and shipped our belongings to the west coast; commissioned at General Assembly in Chattanooga, TN in June 1964; said goodbye to family and friends; and drove to San Francisco.

There was no doubt in our minds that God had directed our paths to this point and would continue to do so. He would be with us each step of the way.

We were encouraged and strengthened by the faith of other missionaries on the ship – some had served in Japan and other countries for many years. We enjoyed Bible studies and prayer meetings with them.

Buddy and I frequently arose early to go up on the deck of the ship just to have some quiet moments. With three very energetic young sons, quiet times were special. It had been raining. Suddenly we could see a double rainbow across the expanse of the sky and the ocean. The colors were so brilliant. We stood in awe and wonderment of this sign of God's promise to Noah thousands of years ago.

To us it was of special significance. We were embarking on a missionary journey not knowing what was ahead. God was assuring us of His presence in all that we would encounter and undertake. The wonder of this moment would sustain us for some twenty-six years in Japan and beyond.

I am truly blessed and grateful to be a small part of this wonderful family called Cumberland Presbyterian. The “stone or stones” in each of our lives is a great and colorful story which we need to share and celebrate.

Discussion Questions and Reflection Activities

Scripture: Matthew 28: 16-20

In keeping with the theme "What do these stones mean", Beverly Stott tells of a time of immense anticipation as the Stott family left the comfort of their home country to cross over into a new land and a culture to which they were not accustomed. Even though they experienced anxiety and apprehension, they knew that God was with them every step of the way. Knowing that God does not call every Christian to travel to strange and distant lands, we need to be always be listening for God's call in the places we find ourselves each day.

Questions:

Describe a time in your life when you knew that God was calling you to a new place, a new job, or a new life situation. If you made this decision, how has it affected the rest of your life? If you did not accept the new challenge, how do you think this choice has affected your life?

How are you as a Women's Ministry group attempting to carry out the Great Commission given by our Lord Jesus Christ in the places where you live and witness? What stones are you placing in your community that will last through the generations?

Prayer:

Gracious Father, we thank you that you have called your followers throughout the ages to go to new places to deliver your message. We also give thanks for those who came among us to teach and guide us in your way. Forgive us, Father, when we have failed to listen or act on your call. May we always be open to your guidance and be assured that you will be with us in every step that we take to do your will. In the name of our Blessed Savior we pray. Amen

JERUSALEM CUMBERLAND PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

Cornelia Swain, Memphis, TN

Jerusalem Cumberland Presbyterian Church (yes, it really was and is Jerusalem Church) is the “stone” in my life. (It has always been fun to tell people that I am from Jerusalem!) It was a very small, rural church, but it was “my” place from the time I was born until I finished college except for a period during World War II when it was closed. Numbers were very small and people had little money or gas stamps to go where they needed to go including church.



After a time the church was revitalized and we began having services and Sunday school on Sunday afternoon because that was when we could get a minister to preach. But it continued to grow and develop so that we began having morning services twice a month, but Sunday school every Sunday. It was Sunday school that was the mainstay of our church as everyone came to Sunday school and stayed for worship when we had a minister.

Originally we had a one-room church building with classes meeting in the corners of the church. That was sometimes difficult as my father taught the adult class, and he did not have a soft voice. But we made the best of it and learned our Bible stories, memorized Bible verses, and had some activities and “picture cards” to go along with the story.

Our teachers were not what we would call “trained” by today’s standards, but they were wonderful people who were very committed to teaching all the children and young people to know the Bible, believe in Christ, and give our lives to Christ as Savior.

As I grew older I began teaching the high school class, which was really my own age group, but it was quite a learning experience even so. By then we had added a couple of Sunday school rooms at the back of the church so we had our own room behind folding doors, for which we were very grateful.

It was during the Sunday school assembly that I began playing the piano for people to sing. The leader and I would pick out the hymns, and I would practice at home all week, so I could play them the next Sunday. And then at some point I graduated to being the church pianist.

It was in this church that I made my profession of faith in Christ, joined the church and dedicated my life to Christian service. It was through very dedicated leaders and Christian parents that I continued to grow in the faith and began searching out my calling. I always knew there was a special place for me. Though it took a while to find that place, I never wavered in the fact that I was “called” just as certainly as any clergy person feels a call to preach.

This place is my “stone” and this stone has meant that I grew and developed as a Christian in a very small, rural church that provided for me the foundation of my faith and my call to Christian service. So I join with many of you in thanking God for the small churches which were/are very dedicated in their ministry and willing to go the second mile to provide Christian training for all their children and youth.

Discussion Questions and Reflection Activities

Scripture: Colossians 2:7; 3:16

Cornelia shares with us precious memories of a place dear to her heart. A small country church nurtured and shaped her into the leader that she became, serving on the staff of our denominational Boards of Christian Education and Missions for many years. At the same time her home church grew into a thriving congregation.

Many of us may have come from home congregations where we still serve. We give thanks for the "stones" that guided our way into maturity, allowed us to develop our talents, and challenged us to become "stones" in our own right. Or we may have moved into new and modern environments where we can shine forth as lights in the darkness as well.

Questions:

To what church do you give credit for helping to make you the person you are today?

Who were the "stones" that inspired and shaped you?

How is your Circle, Sunday school class, and church governance specifically developing opportunities for the youth and new Christians in your congregation and area of influence? What more can be done to inspire our youth and new members?

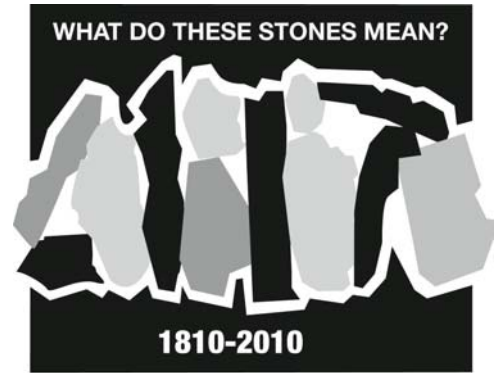
Prayer:

Lord, we give thanks for those who came before us and provided for our spiritual guidance as we grew in the faith. We pray for your continuing guidance in our roles as shepherds and helping stones to our youth and the "seekers" in this church and community. In the name of the Good Shepherd we pray. Amen

A MOUNTAIN: MY STONES

Nona Thomas, Birmingham, Alabama

As I sat in my living room in Manizales, Colombia looking out the window my eyes did not see the streaming golden sunlight that usually gave me comfort in the quiet of the morning. As I was sipping my hot tea to soothe my sore throat, I moved closer to the window to ponder where had the sunlight gone. As I adjusted my eyes I saw black snow, which seemed weird to me but it was actually volcanic dust. I turned on the radio to hear the warning that the Volcano Nevado Ruiz was spitting out ashes and that we should all stay indoors that day. The doorbell rang, I answered, and there was a masked man, it was just the milkman delivering the milk for the day, but it sure scared me. I decided to close the curtains, lock the door and read my Bible.



*What is this stone? **Trust God with all your heart.***

Reading in Psalm 3 for comfort I read “O Lord how many are my foes” a sore throat, volcanic ash, and the Colombian drug lords were blowing up buildings. “How many rise up against me. Many are saying of me God will not deliver him. But you are a shield around me, O Lord; you bestow glory on me and lift up my head.” Friends and family were telling me to come home to America where it was safe. The Colombian women were relentless in their encouragement to the young American missionary. They would bring me gifts, make me hot chocolate and send me fresh flowers. They loved me, and my family, and told me over and over how they had prayed to God for a missionary family.

*What is this stone? **God listens.***

“To the Lord I cry aloud, and he answers me from his holy hill.” I knew the volcano that was making it rain black dust was also a picture of strength in my mind. I would cling to that image of God’s strength. I cried out to God-“Give me your strength.” In Psalm 121 these words etched into my mind this particular day “I will lift up my eyes to the hills where does my help come from? My help comes from the Lord who made heaven and earth.” I looked outside into the dimness and not seeing the mountain I looked up in faith knowing it was surrounding me reminding that God’s presence in our lives is the rock that we embrace as we journey through life.

*What is this stone? **God is faithful.***

A few months passed and once again I was lifting up my voice saying “Give me strength and surround me with your presence” The local army base had an explosion earlier in the day shaking the windows throughout the house. I was a little nervous and nine months pregnant. While preparing dinner, I sliced my finger with a knife and the throbbing pain from the deep cut was constant but when I laid down, I felt the peace of God and fell asleep. Through a series of miraculous events our daughter was born at home later that night without complications and in perfect health.

*What is this stone? **God is with us.***

My soul focused on the rock outside my window throughout my years in Colombia. Friends and family were in awe of the events that took place in our lives. The rock stayed firm through a tonsillectomy and the early birth of another child all on the same day. (This was not the plan, the third child just decided to come since we were already at the hospital. Unfortunately, we were at the wrong hospital for childbirth)

*What stone is this? **God is a fortress.***

When contractions began at six months of pregnancy, I clamored over and over for the life of the unborn child. My body was ill. The hospital had a staph infection, I was sent to a small clinic not equipped for the birth of a premature baby. My God and my stronghold healed me, and my son, Caleb Josiah, who was born at full term.

*What is the stone? **Jehovah heals.***

My rocks, the stories I tell my children, my friends and my faith family are meant to be altars that remind us of God's faithfulness, of God's awesomeness of God's healing power, of God's strength. Each of these testimonies is meant to bring glory to God.

So what are the stones in your life that bring glory to God?

Discussion Questions and Reflection Activities

Scripture: I Cor.10: 1-4

In Nona Thomas's reflection on her time spent in Colombia as a missionary, she summons up five powerful images of God as our "Rock". In each of these episodes, Nona was provided with the strength, courage, and healing that she needed to carry out the work God had sent her to do. When we review them: "Trust God with all your heart," "God is faithful," "God is with us," "God is a fortress," and "Jehovah heals," these images summon to our minds and hearts, times in our own lives when we depended on God in each of these ways.

Questions:

Taking each "rock" one at a time, give your members opportunity to share instances when God provided this type of guidance and protection for them.

Can you give the "Rock" any other names through which He has enabled and guided you during a critical time? Write these names on newsprint or chalkboard.

Prayer:

Give thanks for the times when God has been the "rock" on which you could depend, no matter what was happening. Ask for guidance in sharing this witness.

THE LAND ROVER

Beth & Boyce Wallace, Cali, Colombia

The early Land Rovers were sturdy, strong and uncomfortable vehicles that needed log truck drivers to steer them, but they were ideal for the rough Colombian terrain. We bought ours from Glenda who was returning to California shortly after her husband died. The Land Rover had a bullet hole in the top, which caused every rider to ask, "What happened?"



Glenda had met and married Obdulio Barrios, Jr. while he was studying agriculture at Stanford University and they moved to Armenia, his home town, to be in charge of his father's coffee farms. They had just settled in when on a Sunday afternoon drive with their two small children they were stopped by armed men who kidnapped Obdulio and took him in his Land Rover. No one knows what happened in the jeep but he was shot and one bullet went through the roof. He was left abandoned to die in the jeep. He was found barely alive and brought to Cali where he died in the hospital.

The bullet hole in the Land Rover was punctured at the beginning of the kidnapping phase of the 50 years of violence in Colombia. Thousands of Colombians and foreigners would be kidnapped in the next twenty years. Some are still being held today.

Obdulio was part of the Barrios-Correal family that had moved into Quindio, where the rich soil has made it the coffee growing sector of Colombia. They were also among the first to hear the Gospel preached and became strong Christians. They would become founders of the Cumberland Presbyterian Church in Quindio, now a Colombian state. These pioneers of the Gospel knew the horrors and persecutions of the earlier political-religious phase of the Violence and now experienced it first hand with Obdulio's murder.

Earlier opposition to the Gospel and persecution had not extinguished the Evangelical churches in Colombia. Neither would the kidnappings destroy the faith of the family. What does this bullet hole in the top of our old Land Rover mean? It reminds us of a living faith in the midst of violence. The Bible is stronger than the bullet!

Discussion Questions and Reflection Activities

Scripture: 1 Corinthians 15: 55-58

Beth and Boyce Wallace have served in Colombia, SA since the mid 1960's. They persevered and served there in spite of the long period of "The Violence" with it's kidnappings and murders, even choosing to continue living in this their adopted homeland after their retirement still today.

In this lesson the "Stone" to which they refer might have been considered by many to be a stumbling block rather than a building block. Instead, the stories they tell always reflect a message of hope and encouragement for all who would hear. Many times our churches in Colombia are the only stones of help in a barrio or neighborhood, providing shelter and inspiration from the Gospel preached for those who believe. What an inspiration they provide to us!

Questions:

In our country are we allowing fear of terrorists and unknown dangers affect our witness?

How does this testimony inspire you to not "live in a spirit of fear"?

Name some "stones" of belief your local Women's Ministry group provides for a few or for any who come seeking solace, courage and inspiration in the midst of a fearful world?

Prayer:

Heavenly Father, too often we allow fear to overcome us and keep us from carrying out the mission you would have us do. Forgive us when we allow a spirit of fear to block out the light of your love and keep us from doing your will. Thank you, Father for the witness of our Colombian sisters and brothers in Christ. We do, so earnestly, pray for your continuing guidance and inspiration in this fearful world in which we live. In Jesus name we pray, Amen

A MISSIONARY STONE

Grace Yu-Leung, Jordan, Kowloon, Hong Kong

Sometimes I love to recall the evening almost about 40 years ago, we, then the young people of Kowloon CPC, sitting on the floor of Sister Annie Skau Berntsen's sitting room, listening to her sharing before going to visit patients of the hospital. Sister Berntsen was a Norwegian, but spent almost all her life in China and Hong Kong serving as a missionary nurse.



I was then a freshman at college, a young Christian attending the youth fellowship of Kowloon CPC. The fellowship had an outreach program monthly, we went to a hospital to lead gospel meeting and to visit patients in different wards of the hospital. Sister Berntsen would deliver a message to us before going to the wards. I could recall that evening, about twenty of us sitting on the floor of her sitting room, Sister Berntsen stood in front of the table lamp, she was so tall (over six feet), we all had to lift up our heads high to listen to her. She shared with us the miracle of Jesus feeding the five thousand. She stretched out her hands as if she was holding the loaves and fishes, and said, “And Jesus blessed them, and broke them; it multiplied and fed five thousand people. If you want to serve God, it is not how gifted you are or how good you are that counts, but the willingness to commit yourself to the Lord that counts. God can use you as a blessing to many.” My heart was touched by God, I had been praying and seeking God's will in my life after becoming a Christian, somehow felt that I was unworthy to be called to serve God. But that evening God spoke to me, “Just commit yourself to me, including all your limitations into my hands, you will be different.” Sister Berntsen's life testified to the faithfulness of God; she had been a blessing to many.

During my almost thirty years of ministry in the church, there were times I like to recall that evening, and when I do, my heart is peaceful and sometimes tears come out of gratitude.

Discussion Questions and Reflection Activities

Scripture: Exodus 3:11-14, 4: 11-12

Many of us have a defining moment in our lives when we knew that God was calling us to do something for His Kingdom. Some answer "Yes". Some answer, "No". Some want to bargain with God and make excuses, much like Moses did. Often we wander through a wilderness of reasons we have ready for most any request that comes our way. Even as God told Grace that He would supply the talents and words that she would need, He still speaks to us if we but open our hearts and ears and answer "Yes".

These callings may not be for a lifetime. They may be for a specific task that needs to be done right here in your Circle or Sunday School. Grace Yu is very mindful of the missionary who was instrumental in her surrendering to a call to full time ministry. Sister Bernsten was truly a "stone," who helped Grace with her decision.

Questions:

Invite women to share of a time when they felt God calling them to some task or ministry?

When did you step outside your comfort zone to help someone, to lead a group, or to make a talk?

Who was instrumental in leading you to hear God's call?

Prayer:

Pray that the winds of the Spirit continue to blow through your life, to encourage and challenge you in your everyday events. Ask for forgiveness, if you have not already, for the times when you have refused to listen to and carry out God's call, no matter how large or small.