

27th March 2025

Stones

**“With aching hands and bleeding feet
We dig and heap, lay stone on stone.”**

Matthew Arnold, *Morality* (1852)

This prayer was first used in Iona Abbey and later in my local church, where, like the ancient abbey, the stone walls are visible to every worshipper. It's adapted from a piece in my book, *Welcoming Each Wonder* (see www.ionabooks.com), and serves as a reminder that every stone, large or small, always has a place.

Stones

God of this place, there are big stones in these walls, solid, dependable stones, hauled up onto scaffolding by pulleys and ropes, heaved into place by skilled masons, and holding these walls in place, for centuries, for decades, for now, so that we can use this sanctuary for our worship and rest. God of this place, thank you for these big stones, for their strength and purpose, and for their enduring ability to make this place what it needs to be.

God of this place, there are little stones in these walls, fitted in, banged into place, to fill the gaps, to bind with other stones to make these walls complete: misshapen stones, all with a space for their shape alone; once discarded stones, discarded no longer; odd stones, yet each one important. God of this place, thank you for the little stones, for their unobtrusive, necessary part, strengthening these walls for us, making this place what it needs to be.

God of our lives, thank you for the big people, in our churches, our communities, our world, carrying responsibilities, carved out for important roles: people we rely on; people who are our role models; people we trust. God of our lives, help the big people to hang-in-there, because we need them so much, to keep the whole thing going, making our world what it needs to be. And if I'm one of those big stones, help me not to crumble with the weight of it all.

God of our lives, help us remember the little people, those seemingly insignificant, misshapen people, who don't get much recognition: shy people; diffident people; gentle people; low-self-esteem people; not-sure-I'm-really-any-good people. Fit them into your walls, to make the church, our communities, our world what they're meant to be. For without them, churches crumble, communities perish, the walls of our world fall down. God of our lives, hooray for little people! Three cheers for little stones! Thank God they're there.

And if I'm a misshapen, ordinary stone, minding my own business, doing my bit, filling my place in the wall, just being me, thank you for putting me here. Thank you for believing in me and building me into your walls. Amen.

A prayer for today

Thank God that I can be a living stone, built into the walls of things that matter. Amen

An original reflection © Tom Gordon

Also available at <https://swallowsnestnet.wordpress.com>