

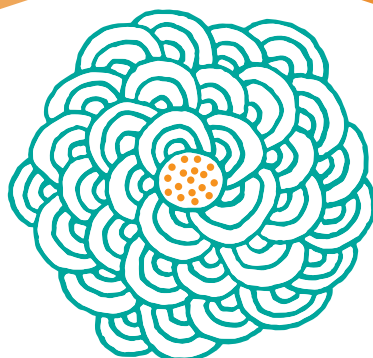
This curriculum frees people to live their Reformed faith by

REMEMBERING • RECLAIMING • REARTICULATING

WHAT WE BELIEVE ABOUT WHO GOD IS AND WHO WE ARE

SO THE PATTERNS OF OUR LIVES EMBODY THE

LIBERATING LOVE AND GRACE OF JESUS CHRIST.



TESTIMONY

VOCABULARY OF FAITH

• A SIX-WEEK CURRICULUM •

WHO IS GOD 1 *ALMIGHTY*
WHO ARE WE 2 *IMAGO DEI*
GOD IN RELATIONSHIP 3 *COVENANT*
GOD WHO SAVES 4 *GRACE*
GOD OF ACTION 5 *LOVE*
GOD OF BELONGING 6 *CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY*

The Presbyterian
OUTLOOK



VOCABULARY OF FAITH

**GOD IN
RELATIONSHIP
COVENANT**

TEACHING PROPOSITION

Covenant is the primary way in which God relates to humanity through the work of the Spirit, binding us together into community so that we may experience the inbreaking of God's grace and love in our lives.

TEXTS

- » Genesis 6:5-22, 9:17
- » Genesis 12:1-9, 15:1-6, 17:1-2
- » Exodus 2:23-25, 6:2-8, 19:3-8; Joshua 23:11-16
- » 2 Samuel 7:4-17; 1 Chronicles 17:7-14
- » Jeremiah 31:31-34; Isaiah 42:1-9; Luke 22:15-20; 1 Corinthians 11:23-26;
- » Ephesians 2:4-10; Hebrews 9:15

TEACHING OUTLINE

- » 5 min Welcome and Opening Prayer
- » 5 min Brainstorming current covenants
- » 15 min Remembering and exploring biblical covenants
- » 15 min Rearticulating covenant relationships
- » 15 min Reclaiming covenantal living
- » 5 min Closing litany

LEADER PREPARATION (IN PERSON)

- » Make copies of Appendices A and C or create a PowerPoint/Keynote/Prezi slide with the information on it.
- » Familiarize yourself with the teaching insights in Appendix B and weave it into your teaching remarks.
- » Download video and test it on equipment

RESOURCES & MATERIALS

- » Copies of Appendices
- » Bibles or Bible apps (if not using appendices)
- » Dry-erase board or Flipchart and markers.
- » AV equipment for showing video and/or any media presentation.

LEADER PREPARATION (VIRTUAL)

- » Prepare to email Appendices A and C to participants or post them in the chat function of your Videoconferencing platform or create a PowerPoint/Keynote/Prezi slide with the information and prepare to share your screen.
- » Familiarize yourself with the teaching insights in Appendix B and weave it into your teaching remarks.
- » Ensure the settings on your Videoconferencing platform are configured for the best sound and video if you sharing screen.
- » Download video and test it on equipment

RESOURCES & MATERIALS

- » Open Appendices on computer so they are ready to screen share.
- » Open video on computer so it is ready to show in screen share.
- » Post Appendices in chat function of Videoconferencing platform or email them to participants.
- » Remind participants to have plain paper and markers on hand for this session.

ARRIVE EARLY TO SET OUT BIBLES AND ARRANGE THE SEATS IN A WAY THAT IS CONDUCIVE TO TODAY'S SESSION, YOUR TEACHING STYLE AND THE PARTICIPANTS' LEARNING STYLES. IF TEACHING VIRTUALLY, TEST TECHNOLOGY; TEND TO VISUALS SUCH AS LIGHTING, BACKGROUND AND SOUND; AND EMAIL APPENDICES OR HANDOUTS TO PARTICIPANTS. OPEN ON YOUR COMPUTER AND HAVE READY ANY ITEMS YOU WILL USE IN SCREEN-SHARE MODE.

GATHERING RITUAL

WELCOME PEOPLE AS THEY ARRIVE IN PERSON OR VIRTUALLY. WHEN IT IS TIME TO BEGIN, INVITE PARTICIPANTS TO JOIN YOU IN PRAYER OR YOUR REGULAR OPENING RITUAL. YOU MAY USE THIS PRAYER OR INVITE PARTICIPANTS TO SHARE THEIR JOYS AND CONCERNS, THEN LEAD THEM IN PRAYER.

God of the ages and God of today, to our utter amazement you yearn to be in relationship with us. Your continuing and amazing grace beckons us to greater faithfulness, and for that and so many other things we are deeply grateful. Open us to the presence of your Spirit in this moment

that we may hear and understand your wisdom in new and renewing ways. Then, Holy One, quicken within us a desire to live in ways that reflect the gift of your grace, your amazing love and our continuing covenantal relationship. Amen.

IF THERE ARE NEW PEOPLE IN THE GROUP, INVITE ALL PARTICIPANTS TO INTRODUCE THEMSELVES.

REMEMBERING

COVENANT IS THE PRIMARY WAY IN WHICH GOD RELATES TO HUMANITY

IN THIS SECTION OF THE SESSION, YOU ARE ANSWERING THE QUESTION, "WHAT DO YOU WANT PARTICIPANTS TO UNDERSTAND ABOUT COVENANT?" THE SCRIPTURE EXPLORATION AND THE TEACHING POINTS IN THIS SECTION WILL HELP PARTICIPANTS SEE THE WAYS IN WHICH GOD RELATES TO HUMANITY THROUGH COVENANTS.



ASK

- » What comes to mind when we say the word covenant? (possible answers include marriage, baptism, employment or land contracts, peace or trade treaties)
- » What is a covenant? (Webster's Dictionary: a formal and binding promise)

MOVE INTO THE NEXT SECTION OF THE SESSION BY INCORPORATING THE FOLLOWING TEACHING POINTS INTO THE TRANSITION:



TEACHING POINTS

- » Formal agreements existed between governments, kings and people before Scripture was written.
- » The word covenant takes on a whole new understanding and significance when God is at the center.
- » A careful look at the five major biblical covenants will bring insight as to the nature and character of God.

DIVIDE PARTICIPANTS INTO FIVE GROUPS AND ASSIGN EACH GROUP A SET OF TEXTS. IN APPENDIX A AT THE END OF THIS SESSION YOU WILL FIND HANDOUTS, ONE FOR EACH GROUP, WITH THE SCRIPTURE TEXTS ON THEM. YOU MAY ALSO CHOOSE TO HAVE THE PARTICIPANTS USE THEIR OWN BIBLES, BIBLE APPS, OR THE BIBLES IN YOUR MEETING SPACE. ASK EACH GROUP TO READ THE SCRIPTURES, DISCUSS THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS AND BE PREPARED TO SHARE THEIR RESPONSES WITH THE WHOLE GROUP.



REFLECT

- » Who initiates the covenant?
- » What is promised and/or expected of each party?
- » What are the characteristics of God in these texts?
- » What are the characteristics of people in these texts?
- » How would you characterize this covenant?

INVITE EACH GROUP TO SHARE THEIR RESPONSES TO THE QUESTIONS. MAKE NOTE OF SIMILARITIES AND DIFFERENCES BETWEEN THE COVENANTS AS GROUPS SHARE THEIR FINDINGS.

MOVE INTO THE NEXT SECTION OF THE SESSION BY INCORPORATING THE FOLLOWING TEACHING POINTS INTO THE TRANSITION:



TEACHING POINTS

- » What we learn from an exploration of Scripture is that covenants are the primary way in which God establishes relationships with creature and creation — with us and with the world.
- » Covenants tell us about who God is, who we are and the faithfulness to which we are called in daily living.

• RECLAIMING •

THE EXPERIENCE OF GOD'S INBREAKING GRACE AND LOVE IN OUR LIVES

HERE IS WHERE YOU, AS THE TEACHER, PROVIDE THEOLOGICAL INSIGHTS ON COVENANT TO INCREASE PARTICIPANTS' VOCABULARY OF FAITH. THIS IS THE SECTION OF THE SESSION WHERE YOU ARE ANSWERING THE QUESTION, "WHY IS IT IMPORTANT FOR OUR FAITH, OUR LIVES, OUR CHURCH, OUR COMMUNITY OR WORLD TO UNDERSTAND THE SIGNIFICANCE OF COVENANTS?" THERE ARE SEVERAL WAYS TO DO THIS, AND THE DECISION WILL BE BASED ON YOUR TEACHING STYLE AND THE PARTICIPANTS' LEARNING STYLE PREFERENCES. WE HAVE PROVIDED TWO RESOURCES FOR YOU TO WORK WITH TO CRAFT THIS PART OF YOUR SESSION.



RESOURCES

- » **APPENDIX B** — At the end of this session you will find a page "Insights on Covenant" (Appendix B) that provides theological content for understanding and teaching covenants. You can use the material to create a PowerPoint/Keynote/Prezi, to craft a mini-lecture or to cull out particular points to share with the group. You may use this appendix to craft teaching points to weave into the discussion. Think of this as a "cheat sheet" that we have assembled so your research time is minimized.
- » **VIDEO** — A short 7-11 minute video is also provided for you to use. A professor, a pastor/educator and a lay leader each briefly share their thoughts on covenant. You can use this video to introduce the topic, to start the discussion or to reinforce the teaching points you developed from "Insights on Covenant" (Appendix B). You may also choose not to use the video.

• REARTICULATING •

THE WORK OF THE SPIRIT BINDING US TOGETHER INTO COMMUNITY

IN THIS SECTION OF THE SESSION EACH PARTICIPANT IS ANSWERING THE QUESTION, "HOW WILL I (MY FAMILY, THE CHURCH) LIVE DIFFERENTLY NOW THAT I UNDERSTAND COVENANTS AND WHY THEY ARE IMPORTANT?"

MOVE INTO THE NEXT SECTION BY INCORPORATING THE FOLLOWING TEACHING POINTS INTO THE TRANSITION:



TEACHING POINTS

- » It is the Holy Spirit who binds our promises with God and one another in community.
- » It is the Spirit's ongoing work that keeps our covenant relationship vibrant and relevant still today.
- » Now that we have a better understanding of covenant, we must ask, "So what?"
- » Now that we have remembered and reclaimed covenant, let's consider how we will rearticulate it through the ways we live our faith in the world.

DISCERNMENT ABOUT FAITHFUL LIVING IS BEST DONE IN COMMUNITY. USE THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS, OR THOSE OF YOUR OWN, TO PROMPT HONEST, VULNERABLE AND DEEP DISCUSSION ABOUT EMBODYING OUR FAITH IN THE WORLD. THIS CAN BE DONE AS A WHOLE GROUP, IN SMALL GROUPS OR IN PAIRS. IN THIS SESSION WE ARE CREATING SPACE FOR THE WORK OF THE SPIRIT IN BUILDING A BRIDGE BETWEEN WHAT WE BELIEVE AND HOW WE LIVE. BECAUSE DISCIPLESHIP IS A "TEAM SPORT," WE DO THIS TOGETHER, IN CONVERSATION WITH OTHER DISCIPLES WHO ARE ON THIS JOURNEY WITH US. THE KEY IS FOR EACH PERSON, IN COMMUNITY, TO WRESTLE WITH HOW THIS NEW UNDERSTANDING OF COVENANT WILL CHANGE THE WAY WE THINK, THE WAY WE ACT AND WHO WE ARE AT THE CORE OF OUR BEING AS WE ALL SEEK TO LIVE INTO GREATER FAITHFULNESS.



GOING DEEPER

- » What difference does it make in your life/the church/the world that God seeks to be in relationship with us and will never walk away?
- » In what ways will you live differently because of God's grace and faithfulness?
- » Where do you see the inbreaking of God's grace in your life/the church/the world?
- » What are the challenges or impediments to living in covenant relationship with God and one another? What are the opportunities?

SENDING RITUAL

AS THE SESSION COMES TO AN END, MOVE INTO THE SENDING RITUAL OF A RESPONSIVE READING OF PSALM 136 (APPENDIX C).

YOU MAY WANT TO WEAVE THE FOLLOWING INTO YOUR TRANSITION:



TEACHING POINTS

- » In most versions of the Christian Bible, the refrain of Psalm 136 reads, "God's steadfast love endures forever."
- » The Hebrew word for "steadfast love" is *hesed*, which translates into English as "God's covenantal love."
- » Because it is a covenant, the relational love between God and humanity endures forever.
- » The psalm rehearses the mighty acts of the majestic Creator God, who redeems and sustains us through the ages. It reminds us that it is this sovereign and faithful God who reaches out to us through covenants and will not let us go.

THE LEADER WILL READ THE ITALICIZED PARTS OF THE PSALM AND THE PARTICIPANTS WILL READ THE BOLDED REFRAIN

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COVENANT
APPENDIX A

SCRIPTURE

COVENANT

GROUP 1

Genesis 6:5-22, 9:8-17

Noah

Chapter 6

The LORD saw that the wickedness of humankind was great in the earth, and that every inclination of the thoughts of their hearts was only evil continually. And the LORD was sorry that he had made humankind on the earth, and it grieved him to his heart. So the LORD said, "I will blot out from the earth the human beings I have created—people together with animals and creeping things and birds of the air, for I am sorry that I have made them." But Noah found favor in the sight of the LORD.

These are the descendants of Noah. Noah was a righteous man, blameless in his generation; Noah walked with God. And Noah had three sons, Shem, Ham, and Japheth.

Now the earth was corrupt in God's sight, and the earth was filled with violence. And God saw that the earth was corrupt; for all flesh had corrupted its ways upon the earth. And God said to Noah, "I have determined to make an end of all flesh, for the earth is filled with violence because of them; now I am going to destroy them along with the earth. Make yourself an ark of cypress wood; make rooms in the ark, and cover it inside and out with pitch. This is how you are to make it: the length of the ark three hundred cubits, its width fifty cubits, and its height thirty cubits. Make a roof for the ark, and finish it to a cubit above; and put the door of the ark in its side; make it with lower, second, and third decks. For my part, I am going to bring a flood of waters on the earth, to destroy from under heaven all flesh in which is the breath of life; everything that is on the earth shall die. But I will establish my covenant with you; and you shall come into the ark, you, your sons, your wife, and your sons' wives with you. And of every living thing, of all flesh, you shall bring two of every kind into the ark, to keep them alive with you; they shall be male and female. Of the birds according to their kinds, and of the animals according to their kinds, of every creeping thing of the ground according to its kind, two of every kind shall come in to you, to keep them alive. Also take with you every kind of food that is eaten, and store it up; and it shall serve as food for you and for them." Noah did this; he did all that God commanded him.

SCRIPTURE

COVENANT

Chapter 9

Then God said to Noah and to his sons with him, "As for me, I am establishing my covenant with you and your descendants after you, and with every living creature that is with you, the birds, the domestic animals, and every animal of the earth with you, as many as came out of the ark. I establish my covenant with you, that never again shall all flesh be cut off by the waters of a flood, and never again shall there be a flood to destroy the earth." God said, "This is the sign of the covenant that I make between me and you and every living creature that is with you, for all future generations: I have set my bow in the clouds, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and the earth. When I bring clouds over the earth and the bow is seen in the clouds, I will remember my covenant that is between me and you and every living creature of all flesh; and the waters shall never again become a flood to destroy all flesh. When the bow is in the clouds, I will see it and remember the everlasting covenant between God and every living creature of all flesh that is on the earth." God said to Noah, "This is the sign of the covenant that I have established between me and all flesh that is on the earth."

SCRIPTURE COVENANT

GROUP 2

Genesis 12:1-9, 15:1-6, 17:1-22

Abraham

Chapter 12

Now the LORD said to Abram, "Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and the one who curses you I will curse; and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed."

So Abram went, as the LORD had told him; and Lot went with him. Abram was seventy-five years old when he departed from Haran. Abram took his wife Sarai and his brother's son Lot, and all the possessions that they had gathered, and the persons whom they had acquired in Haran; and they set forth to go to the land of Canaan. When they had come to the land of Canaan, Abram passed through the land to the place at Shechem, to the oak of Moreh. At that time the Canaanites were in the land. Then the LORD appeared to Abram, and said, "To your offspring I will give this land." So he built there an altar to the LORD, who had appeared to him. From there he moved on to the hill country on the east of Bethel, and pitched his tent, with Bethel on the west and Ai on the east; and there he built an altar to the LORD and invoked the name of the LORD. And Abram journeyed on by stages toward the Negeb.

Chapter 15

After these things the word of the LORD came to Abram in a vision, "Do not be afraid, Abram, I am your shield; your reward shall be very great." But Abram said, "O Lord GOD, what will you give me, for I continue childless, and the heir of my house is Eliezer of Damascus?" And Abram said, "You have given me no offspring, and so a slave born in my house is to be my heir." But the word of the LORD came to him, "This man shall not be your heir; no one but your very own issue shall be your heir." He brought him outside and said, "Look toward heaven and count the stars, if you are able to count them." Then he said to him, "So shall your descendants be." And he believed the LORD; and the LORD reckoned it to him as righteousness.

SCRIPTURE

COVENANT

Chapter 17

When Abram was ninety-nine years old, the LORD appeared to Abram, and said to him, "I am God Almighty; walk before me, and be blameless. And I will make my covenant between me and you, and will make you exceedingly numerous." Then Abram fell on his face; and God said to him, "As for me, this is my covenant with you: You shall be the ancestor of a multitude of nations. No longer shall your name be Abram, but your name shall be Abraham; for I have made you the ancestor of a multitude of nations. I will make you exceedingly fruitful; and I will make nations of you, and kings shall come from you. I will establish my covenant between me and you, and your offspring after you throughout their generations, for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and to your offspring after you. And I will give to you, and to your offspring after you, the land where you are now an alien, all the land of Canaan, for a perpetual holding; and I will be their God."

God said to Abraham, "As for you, you shall keep my covenant, you and your offspring after you throughout their generations. This is my covenant, which you shall keep, between me and you and your offspring after you: Every male among you shall be circumcised. You shall circumcise the flesh of your foreskins, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and you. Throughout your generations every male among you shall be circumcised when he is eight days old, including the slave born in your house and the one bought with your money from any foreigner who is not of your offspring. Both the slave born in your house and the one bought with your money must be circumcised. So shall my covenant be in your flesh an everlasting covenant. Any uncircumcised male who is not circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin shall be cut off from his people; he has broken my covenant."

God said to Abraham, "As for Sarah your wife, you shall not call her Sarai, but Sarah shall be her name. I will bless her, and moreover I will give you a son by her. I will bless her, and she shall give rise to nations; kings of peoples shall come from her." Then Abraham fell on his face and laughed, and said to himself, "Can a child be born to a man who is a hundred years old? Can Sarah, who is ninety years old, bear a child?" And Abraham said to God, "O that Ishmael might live in your sight!" God said, "No, but your wife Sarah shall bear you a son, and you shall name him Isaac. I will establish my covenant with him as an everlasting covenant for his offspring after him. As for Ishmael, I have heard you; I will bless him and make him fruitful and exceedingly numerous; he shall be the father of twelve princes, and I will make him a great nation. But my covenant I will establish with Isaac, whom Sarah shall bear to you at this season next year." And when he had finished talking with him, God went up from Abraham.

SCRIPTURE

COVENANT

GROUP 3

Exodus 2:23-25, 6:2-8, 19:3-8 and Joshua 23:11-16

Moses

Chapter 2

After a long time the king of Egypt died. The Israelites groaned under their slavery, and cried out. Out of the slavery their cry for help rose up to God. God heard their groaning, and God remembered his covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. God looked upon the Israelites, and God took notice of them.

Chapter 6

God also spoke to Moses and said to him: "I am the LORD. I appeared to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob as God Almighty, but by my name 'The LORD' I did not make myself known to them. I also established my covenant with them, to give them the land of Canaan, the land in which they resided as aliens. I have also heard the groaning of the Israelites whom the Egyptians are holding as slaves, and I have remembered my covenant. Say therefore to the Israelites, 'I am the LORD, and I will free you from the burdens of the Egyptians and deliver you from slavery to them. I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and with mighty acts of judgment. I will take you as my people, and I will be your God. You shall know that I am the LORD your God, who has freed you from the burdens of the Egyptians. I will bring you into the land that I swore to give to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; I will give it to you for a possession. I am the LORD.'

Chapter 19

Then Moses went up to God; the LORD called to him from the mountain, saying, "Thus you shall say to the house of Jacob, and tell the Israelites: You have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself. Now therefore, if you obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession out of all the peoples. Indeed, the whole earth is mine, but you shall be for me a priestly kingdom and a holy nation. These are the words that you shall speak to the Israelites." So Moses came, summoned the elders of the people, and set before them all these words that the LORD had commanded him. The people all answered as one: "Everything that the LORD has spoken we will do." Moses reported the words of the people to the LORD.

SCRIPTURE

COVENANT

Joshua 23

Be very careful, therefore, to love the LORD your God. For if you turn back, and join the survivors of these nations left here among you, and intermarry with them, so that you marry their women and they yours, know assuredly that the LORD your God will not continue to drive out these nations before you; but they shall be a snare and a trap for you, a scourge on your sides, and thorns in your eyes, until you perish from this good land that the LORD your God has given you. "And now I am about to go the way of all the earth, and you know in your hearts and souls, all of you, that not one thing has failed of all the good things that the LORD your God promised concerning you; all have come to pass for you, not one of them has failed. But just as all the good things that the LORD your God promised concerning you have been fulfilled for you, so the LORD will bring upon you all the bad things, until he has destroyed you from this good land that the LORD your God has given you. If you transgress the covenant of the LORD your God, which he enjoined on you, and go and serve other gods and bow down to them, then the anger of the LORD will be kindled against you, and you shall perish quickly from the good land that he has given to you."

SCRIPTURE COVENANT

GROUP 4

2 Samuel 7:4-17 and 1 Chronicles 17:7-14 **David**

2 Samuel Chapter 7

But that same night the word of the LORD came to Nathan: Go and tell my servant David: Thus says the LORD: Are you the one to build me a house to live in? I have not lived in a house since the day I brought up the people of Israel from Egypt to this day, but I have been moving about in a tent and a tabernacle. Wherever I have moved about among all the people of Israel, did I ever speak a word with any of the tribal leaders of Israel, whom I commanded to shepherd my people Israel, saying, "Why have you not built me a house of cedar?" Now therefore thus you shall say to my servant David: Thus says the LORD of hosts: I took you from the pasture, from following the sheep to be prince over my people Israel; and I have been with you wherever you went, and have cut off all your enemies from before you; and I will make for you a great name, like the name of the great ones of the earth. And I will appoint a place for my people Israel and will plant them, so that they may live in their own place, and be disturbed no more; and evildoers shall afflict them no more, as formerly, from the time that I appointed judges over my people Israel; and I will give you rest from all your enemies. Moreover the LORD declares to you that the LORD will make you a house. When your days are fulfilled and you lie down with your ancestors, I will raise up your offspring after you, who shall come forth from your body, and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build a house for my name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. I will be a father to him, and he shall be a son to me. When he commits iniquity, I will punish him with a rod such as mortals use, with blows inflicted by human beings. But I will not take my steadfast love from him, as I took it from Saul, whom I put away from before you. Your house and your kingdom shall be made sure forever before me; your throne shall be established forever. In accordance with all these words and with all this vision, Nathan spoke to David.

SCRIPTURE

COVENANT

1 Chronicles 17:7-14

Now therefore thus you shall say to my servant David: Thus says the LORD of hosts: I took you from the pasture, from following the sheep, to be ruler over my people Israel; and I have been with you wherever you went, and have cut off all your enemies before you; and I will make for you a name, like the name of the great ones of the earth. I will appoint a place for my people Israel, and will plant them, so that they may live in their own place, and be disturbed no more; and evildoers shall wear them down no more, as they did formerly, from the time that I appointed judges over my people Israel; and I will subdue all your enemies. Moreover I declare to you that the LORD will build you a house. When your days are fulfilled to go to be with your ancestors, I will raise up your offspring after you, one of your own sons, and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build a house for me, and I will establish his throne forever. I will be a father to him, and he shall be a son to me. I will not take my steadfast love from him, as I took it from him who was before you, but I will confirm him in my house and in my kingdom forever, and his throne shall be established forever.

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COVENANT APPENDIX B

The bolded statements are the main Teaching Points.
The material under them is information to give you
confidence in teaching and responding to questions.

INSIGHTS ON COVENANT

God always initiates the covenant relationship.

There are two primary kinds of covenants – unconditional and conditional.

- » Unconditional covenants are promises made by God to the community without any expected actions in return. God simply decides to make a covenant, and a relationship is established (Noah, Abraham/Sarah, David, Jesus).
- » Conditional covenants, of which there is only one, come with the expectation that humanity is required to do something in order to receive the promised action (Moses).

Covenant relationships are enduring. They are never revoked or replaced.

Covenants bind us to God and to one another.

Covenants are always communal. The covenant may be made with one person, but the promise and the blessing of the covenant are always for community.

- » Noah did not have to do anything in order for the promise to be made. God simply decided to spare Noah and his family and ultimately promised never to destroy the earth by flood again. There was no condition. God simply broke in, proclaimed and promised.
- » Abraham and Sarah were roaming around minding their own business, and God broke into their lives with a promise and a blessing: “I will make you a great nation. I will bless you so that you can be a blessing to others.” God told Abraham to take his family and go to the land that God would show him ... and Abraham did. The covenant was struck, however, before Abraham responded. Two things were necessary for this covenant promise of a great nation – (1) land and (2) a large family with many descendants – neither of which Abraham had. He was an old, childless nomad whose wife was past child-bearing years. However, the covenant made with Abraham and the fulfillment of that promise would indeed shape the course of faith and history for centuries to come.
- » Moses also experienced God’s inbreaking in the burning bush, but this time the covenant was conditional. God heard the cries and groaning of the Hebrew people and acted. God freed them from bondage, orchestrated their escape from slavery, declared the Hebrews to be God’s own chosen people and provided them with a path to the Promised Land.

However, there was a condition: they must keep the commandments, statutes and ordinances God would give them through Moses. The fulfillment of the covenant with Abraham and Sarah was dependent upon their devotion to God, and only God, and the quality of their communal living. Their love of God was to be concretely expressed in their love of neighbor. For religious Jews, the first five books of the Hebrew Scriptures provide a road map for living faithfully within the Mosaic covenant: love and serve only God, and live in a community where justice and kindness are the priority for all. For Christians, Jesus, grounded in his Jewish heritage and knowledge of the Torah, brings the expectations of this covenant into clear focus in his declaration that the two greatest commandments are love of God and love of neighbor.

Even when humans cannot keep their part of the covenant, God remains faithful.

There may be consequences, but God does not abandon God's people nor the covenant relationship.

- » The ancient Israelites were as human and fallible as we are today. They could not remain faithful to the commandments. They would do well for a while, and then they would become enamored with their own power or the ways of the world. They would worship other gods and fail to give justice to the marginalized and powerless. Even as they crafted and held impressive worship services, their practices throughout the week were inconsistent with God's expectations and made worship a hollow and empty ritual. God was not pleased. The prophets warned Israel and Judah of impending consequences if they did not return to faithful ways of living. Ultimately, they did not, and the land promised to Abraham, ruled by David and his descendants, fell into the hands of the Assyrians, the Babylonians and the Persians. The Babylonian exile was the most significant identity crisis for the Israelites. Who would they be without the Promised Land? without the Temple? Was the covenant gone as well? God would have been well within the terms of the covenant to walk away and establish a relationship with another people. However, here is where we see the inbreaking of God's love and grace so clearly. Even in the face of human unfaithfulness, God remained faithful to the covenant. Yes, there were consequences for their actions, but God did not end the covenant.
- » God used the prophet Jeremiah during the Babylonian exile to remind the people that while they were still living with the consequences of their disobedience, God had a plan for them — a plan for good. God made a new covenant with Israel. It would not be a conditional covenant that was dependent upon human capacity to keep the commandments. They had proven they could not remain faithful. This new covenant would be written on their hearts rather than on stone tablets. The covenant relationship between God and the people would be dependent upon God's grace and love — not

humanity's. The Lord would still be their God and they would be God's own people. God would forgive their wrongdoing and remember their sins no more.

- » A Christian reading of this covenant positions Jesus as the fulfillment of the new covenant. In his life, death and resurrection we see the love and grace of God incarnate. God breaks into our lives and brings us back into right relationship with God before we ever know to ask for it. God saw what we needed and provided us with that which we could not accomplish on our own: salvation, forgiveness and eternal life with God. In this unconditional covenantal relationship, we see it is God who initiates and secures our relationships by choosing us for salvation, and we live grateful lives in response to that unmerited gift of grace. God acted first. God loved first, and we respond in kind, showing our gratitude by love of God and love of neighbor.

It is through covenants that we

- » **See the relational and faithful nature of God who is ever with us.**
- » **Experience the inbreaking of God's grace and steadfast love.**



COVENANT
APPENDIX C

PSALM 23

A COVENANT REWRITE

- 1 O give thanks to the LORD, for he is good,
for God's covenant love endures forever.
- 2 O give thanks to the God of gods,
for God's covenant love endures forever.
- 3 O give thanks to the Lord of lords,
for God's covenant love endures forever.
- 4 who alone does great wonders,
for God's covenant love endures forever.
- 5 who by understanding made the heavens,
for God's covenant love endures forever.
- 6 who spread out the earth on the waters,
for God's covenant love endures forever.
- 7 who made the great lights,
for God's covenant love endures forever.
- 8 the sun to rule over the day,
for God's covenant love endures forever.
- 9 the moon and stars to rule over the night,
for God's covenant love endures forever.
- 10 who struck Egypt through their firstborn,
for God's covenant love endures forever.
- 11 and brought Israel out from among them,
for God's covenant love endures forever.
- 12 with a strong hand and an outstretched arm,
for God's covenant love endures forever.
- 13 who divided the Red Sea^[a] in two,
for God's covenant love endures forever.
- 14 and made Israel pass through the midst of it,
for God's covenant love endures forever.
- 15 but overthrew Pharaoh and his army in the Red Sea,^[b]
for God's covenant love endures forever.
- 16 who led his people through the wilderness,
for God's covenant love endures forever.
- 17 who struck down great kings,
for God's covenant love endures forever.

PSALM 23

A COVENANT REWRITE

18 and killed famous kings,
for God's covenant love endures forever.

19 Sihon, king of the Amorites,
for God's covenant love endures forever.

20 and Og, king of Bashan,
for God's covenant love endures forever.

21 and gave their land as a heritage,
for God's covenant love endures forever.

22 a heritage to his servant Israel,
for God's covenant love endures forever.

23 It is he who remembered us in our low estate,
for God's covenant love endures forever.

24 and rescued us from our foes,
for God's covenant love endures forever.

25 who gives food to all flesh,
for God's covenant love endures forever.

26 O give thanks to the God of heaven,
for God's covenant love endures forever.