

# GOING FORWARD together LIVING IN GOD'S Covenant



## Week 4 - Covenant: Our response to God's grace Bible Reading: Hebrews 9:11-15

TEACH - Content to help inform a sermon or small group outline

### Introduction

- Previously we have considered the place of covenant as, for example, that established between Moses and God on Mount Sinai.
- Great promises were made by the people, committing themselves to abide by the covenant. (Exodus 19:8, 'We will do everything the Lord has said.') However, the keeping of the covenant was often short-lived.
- Jeremiah 31:32, '...because they broke my covenant', reminds us of the propensity of the people to break the covenant. But still God continues to forgive. (Jeremiah 31:34, 'For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more.')
- With the coming of Jesus a new covenant was established through his shed blood. However, even at Jesus' last meal with his disciples as he declared the cup to be a sign of the new covenant, there was denial and betrayal. (Luke 22:20,21, 'This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you. But the hand of him who is going to betray me is with mine on the table.')
- So, just because a covenant is agreed doesn't mean that it will automatically be fulfilled. But what difference can the new covenant make?

### Exploration

#### 1. Saved

- Hebrews chapter 9 gives us an indication of the centrality of Jesus in the establishment of this new covenant over the mechanisms of the old covenant. This old covenant clearly had its place in the lives of the people and gave them the assurance of God's favour over the years.
- But this was a complex set of rules and regulations, with everything, including the items of furniture in the Tabernacle and later the Temple, having significance and, very often, deep meaning. Even the writer to the Hebrews acknowledges this complexity, suggesting that 'we cannot discuss these things in detail now' (Hebrews 9:5).
- So the death of Jesus brought about a new way of being, one not dependent upon the regular sacrificial system repeated year after year in different ways, but now completed once and for all by the blood of Jesus.
- Jesus, the great high priest, entered the most holy place by the shedding of his own blood so that the relationship with God could be established once and for all.



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As we know from our understanding of the Easter story, access to God was established as signified by the curtain of the Temple being torn in two, from top to bottom ([Matthew 27:51](#)).

- And so relationship with God has been re-established through the new covenant, so that 'those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance - now that he has died as a ransom to set them free from the sins committed under the first covenant' (Hebrews 9:15).

## 2. To serve

- This promised eternal inheritance might lead us to think about going to Heaven when we die; but as Jesus himself suggested, eternal life is not just about living for ever but about knowing God and the quality of the life that we live now. (John 17:2,3, 'For you granted him authority over all people that he might give eternal life to all those you have given him. Now this is eternal life: that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent'; and John 10:10, 'I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.')
- As Paul suggests in 2 Corinthians 5:17, 'If anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: the old has gone, the new is here!' Notice the tense here: this is not a future hope, but a present reality, a living of the life of Heaven here on earth, free from the sins committed under the first covenant ([Hebrews 9:15](#)).
- But it also seems to be clear that the new covenant leads us into service. (Hebrews 9:14, '...so that we may serve the living God'.)
- In speaking of the sacrifice of Jesus, William Barclay says, 'The sacrifice of Jesus... is not only the paying of a debt; it is the giving of a victory.' (*The Daily Study Bible*, comment on Hebrews 9:11-14)
- This victory means that we have been set free from sins committed under the first covenant, but not so that we live whatever life we want. That would be to abuse the grace of God, as Paul addresses in Romans (Romans 6:1,2, 'What shall we say, then? Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase? By no means! We are those who died to sin; how can we live in it any longer?')
- However, 'It is for freedom that Christ has set us free' (Galatians 5:1) - freedom not to do our own thing, but to live according to the ways of God, living a life of victory, serving him in all we do.

## Conclusion

- The Bible is full of examples of what this may look like in our own lives as we live out our side of the covenant.
- It may be that the great words of the Old Testament prophet Micah come to mind (Micah 6:8), that we will 'Act justly... love mercy and [to] walk humbly with our God.'



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- It may be Peter's challenge comes to mind, repeating the Levitical call to 'Be holy, because I am holy', indeed encouraging them to 'be holy in all you do'. (1 Peter 1:15)
- So as we are living in the new covenant, saved by the blood of Jesus, let us pray God will help us serve the living God in all we do and in all we are.

## REFLECT - questions for discussion/small groups

### Personal

- Are you looking forward to the promised eternal inheritance or are you experiencing it now?
- Would you say that you live a life of freedom? How does this freedom show itself in your own life?
- If I am saved to serve, is there a danger that what I do (my service) can become more important than who I am (someone enjoying the life of God now)? How can I strike a good balance in my own life?
- Hebrews 9:14 speaks of having our conscience cleansed. As you examine your conscience, do you know something of it being cleansed? How does your living help to have a clear conscience?

### Community

- Is it possible that we have substituted rituals for a genuine engagement with God? What might some of these rituals be? Are they helpful to our life as a corps?
- Does everyone in our corps fellowship feel they have a part to play in serving the living God? How have we been able to do that, even when we have not been able to meet together physically?
- What can our fellowship do to encourage everyone to be the people God has called us to be? How can we ensure that space is given for the apostles, prophets, evangelists, teachers and shepherds to equip God's people for works of service so that the body of Christ may be built up? (Ephesians 4:11,12)



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- What can we do to ensure that those in our fellowship who may not have such an 'up front' way of service, feel as valued as those who do?
- Having experienced the promised eternal inheritance (remembering that eternal is not just about a length of time, but a quality of living), what difference is this making in the everyday life of our corps?

## ENGAGE - Interactive ideas for prayer, worship and mission

- **Rainbow Covenants:** [This activity](#) can be recorded and projected on screen in a worship service. Arrange Skittles in a circle around the edge of a plate (or you can arrange them in the shape of a cross). Pour over enough hot (but not boiling) water to cover all the Skittles and the plate itself. Watch and wait as a rainbow appears on the plate; the colours will move towards the middle and create a whirl of colour. As these colours move and merge into one another, reflect on the unity and relationship between God and his people. This activity could also be done using felt tip pens on a paper towel, and spraying this with water as seen [here](#).
- **A seal/stamp of approval:** Covenants of old would have been stamped with a seal. Each seal would be personalised with symbols representing the owner. While music plays, reflect on the new covenant Christ has welcomed us into and design a seal to represent Christ's work in your life. What has Christ written on your heart? Keep this as a reminder of the covenant relationship you are a part of.
- **Play Your Cards Right (Zoom):** Lay five playing cards face down on a table (make sure all five are in view on your screen). Choose a player to start and turn over the first card. The player can decide whether the second card will be higher or lower than the first (the rest of the group can shout out their thoughts on this too, or write in the chat). If they guess correctly then they go to the third card and guess whether it will higher or lower than the second, and so on. If they guess incorrectly then their go is over and they receive no points. They can choose to 'stick' at any point and collect the points they have gathered - points are awarded for how many cards are turned over, eg 5 points for 5 cards, 4 points for 4 cards etc.
- **Deal or no deal:** Ask for several volunteers to come up to the front to participate in a game, but don't tell them what it involves. You can allow as many people as you'd like to be involved, but keep social distancing rules in mind. Explain to the volunteers that they can stop at any time, but they will lose out on a reward. Explain that there will be three rounds, and anyone who passes the first two can go on to the third round, which will determine who the winner is.



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Round 1: In the first round, have everyone hold out both arms and stand on one foot for five minutes. Ask them beforehand... 'Deal or no deal?' If they succeed, they go on to the next round. If they fail they are out!

Round 2: The second round is tougher. Explain it to them beforehand and ask again, 'Deal or no deal?' Get the contestants to eat Brussels sprouts dipped in Marmite (feel free to make up your own 'meal'). The ones who complete the task go on to the final round, which is the toughest.

Round 3: Show the contestants a blindfold and explain they will not be able to see in this challenge. Again ask 'Deal or no deal?' Blindfold the contestants and ask them if they have any concerns about touching insects/creepy-crawlies. Once everyone is in, bring out bags/boxes with any of the items below inside (you can set up a speech about the horrors that lurk inside and get the congregation to play along by making disgusted sounds etc).

Your boxes can contain things like:

- Cooked, cold spaghetti noodles
- Peeled grapes
- Blanched, peeled tomato
- Slime
- Overcooked rice with raisins in cooking oil

*All of these mimic rotting maggots and bugs*

Each volunteer has to reach into a bag and touch the item for a minute to win.

You can include a tie-breaker activity if there is more than one winner, or share out a prize (eg chocolate coins).

(Game adapted from <https://thesource4ym.com/deal-or-no-deal/> and <https://www.thesprucecrafts.com/halloween-feel-box-game-1244730>)

In these games the volunteers must choose how far they will go to win the reward at the end. There is some risk involved, as in both scenarios their choices were based on the unknown. Christ has established a new covenant with us and we must choose how far we go. Are we all in? Even though we may not be able to see what's ahead of us, Christ goes before us and guides us through. That's the covenant relationship we have.





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- **Remembering a covenant:** For some people, to have an easy way to remember a covenant may be helpful. For example, an acrostic may help.

A covenant might look like:

Making a:

Commitment of my life by  
Offering all there is of me, knowing I am  
Valued by God and I have an  
Eternal inheritance. Therefore I am a  
New creation,  
Accepted by God,  
Now, as well as in the future,  
Trusting God, by his grace, to help me live according to his ways.

Try writing your own acrostic to help with remembering a covenant relationship.

- Read slowly through the following examples of covenants. What strikes you as being particularly significant? What elements are easy to say and to do? Is anything particularly difficult for you to say and to do? Are there any areas of your life which these are speaking directly to - maybe something you need to stop and maybe something you need to start?
  - As you reflect on the various things below, you may want to share your thoughts with someone else. You may want to make a written record of your thoughts. It may help to share those written thoughts with someone you trust.
  - You could ask a trusted friend to hold you accountable to the things you have promised to change in your life.
- **The Soldier's Covenant:** For soldiers in The Salvation Army, the soldier's covenant will have been signed at their enrolment. This is a very deep and powerful statement of recognising who God is, and the beliefs concerning God, whilst also committing to live according to the promises made.

This includes promising to abstain from alcohol and tobacco. However, this is only a small part of a list of promises that are made.

What about these parts of the soldier's covenant, for example?

- *I will make the values of the Kingdom of God and not the values of the world the standard for my life.*
- *I will uphold Christian integrity in every area of my life, allowing nothing in thought, word or deed that is unworthy, unclean, untrue, profane, dishonest or immoral.*
- *I will be actively involved, as I am able, in the life, work, worship and witness of the corps, giving as large a proportion of my income as possible to support its ministries and the worldwide work of the Army.*



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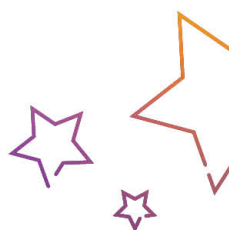
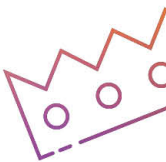
As you have opportunity to think on this covenant, have you considered the depth and significance of these words?

If you are a soldier in The Salvation Army, find your copy of the soldier's covenant and read through the promises to which you have signed your name. What have been the challenges you have faced as you have tried to live out this covenant?

- **The Methodist Covenant:** Part of the tradition of the Methodist Church is the annual Methodist Covenant service. This gives an opportunity, usually at the beginning of every year, to reflect on the following covenant prayer:

*I am no longer my own but yours.  
Put me to what you will, rank me with whom you will;  
Put me to doing, put me to suffering;  
Let me be employed for you, or laid aside for you;  
Let me be full, let me be empty,  
Let me have all things, let me have nothing:  
I freely and wholeheartedly yield all things  
To your pleasure and disposal.  
And now, glorious and blessed God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit,  
You are mine and I am yours.  
And the covenant now made on earth, let it be ratified in heaven. Amen.*

How do you feel when reading this set of promises?  
Do you think this is a covenant you would be able to fulfil in the year to come?  
What do you think of an opportunity to renew covenant promises every year?



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- **Covenant in song:** Several familiar songs are basically an expression of covenant promises. Read through the following songs slowly. What strikes you as being particularly significant? What elements are easy to say and to do? Is anything particularly difficult for you to say and to do? Are there any areas of your life which these are speaking directly to, maybe something you need to stop and maybe something you need to start?

SASB 613:

O Jesus, I have promised  
To serve thee to the end,  
Be thou for ever near me,  
My Master and my friend.  
I shall not fear the battle  
If thou art by my side,  
Nor wander from the pathway  
If thou wilt be my guide.

O let me feel thee near me;  
The world is ever near;  
I see the sights that dazzle,  
The tempting sounds I hear.  
My foes are ever near me,  
Around me and within;  
But, Jesus, draw thou nearer  
And shield my soul from sin.

O let me hear thee speaking  
In accents clear and still,  
Above the storms of passion,  
The murmurs of self-will.  
O speak to reassure me,  
To chasten or control;  
O speak to make me listen,  
Thou Guardian of my soul.

O Jesus, thou hast promised  
To all who follow thee,  
That where thou art in Glory  
There shalt thy servant be;  
And, Jesus, I have promised  
To serve thee to the end;  
O give me grace to follow,  
My Master and my friend.

John Ernest Bode (1816-1874)

SASB 623:

Take my life and let it be  
Consecrated, Lord, to thee;  
Take my moments and my days,  
Let them flow in ceaseless praise.

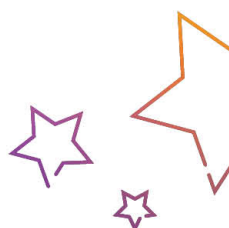
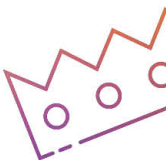
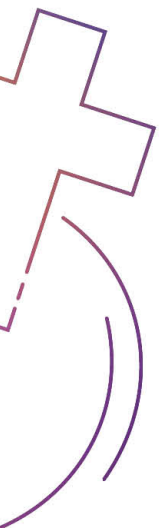
Take my hands and let them move  
At the impulse of thy love;  
Take my feet and let them be  
Swift and beautiful for thee.

Take my voice and let me sing  
Always, only for my King;  
Take my lips and let them be  
Filled with messages from thee.

Take my silver and my gold,  
Not a mite would I withhold;  
Take my intellect and use  
Every power as thou shalt choose.

Take my will and make it thine,  
It shall be no longer mine;  
Take my heart, it is thine own,  
It shall be thy royal throne.  
Take my love; my Lord, I pour  
At thy feet its treasure store;  
Take myself and I will be  
Ever, only, all for thee.

Frances Ridley Havergal (1836-1879)





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SASB 610:

My life must be Christ's broken bread,  
My love his outpoured wine,  
A cup o'erfilled, a table spread  
Beneath his name and sign,  
That other souls, refreshed and fed,  
May share his life through mine.

My all is in the Master's hands  
For him to bless and break;  
Beyond the brook his winepress stands  
And thence my way I take,  
Resolved the whole of love's demands  
To give, for his dear sake.

Lord, let me share that grace of thine  
Wherewith thou didst sustain  
The burden of the fruitful vine,  
The gift of buried grain.  
Who dies with thee, O Word divine,  
Shall rise and live again.

Albert Orsborn (1886-1967)

What other songs express your willingness to be in covenant relationship with God?

- **A personal covenant:** As a young man William Booth dedicated his life to a set of values which he covenanted to keep.

*I do promise - my God helping -*

*1<sup>st</sup> That I will rise every morning sufficiently early (say 20 minutes before seven o'clock) to wash, dress, and have a few minutes, not less than 5, in private prayer.*

*2<sup>ndly</sup> That I will as much as possible avoid all that babbling and idle talking in which I have lately so sinfully indulged.*

*3<sup>rd</sup> That I will endeavour in my conduct and deportment before the world and my fellow servants especially to conduct myself as a humble, meek, and zealous follower of the bleeding Lamb, and by serious conversation and warning endeavour to lead them to think of their immortal souls.*

*4<sup>thly</sup> That I will not read less than 4 chapters in God's word every day.*

*5<sup>thly</sup> That I will strive to live closer to God, and to seek after holiness of heart, and leave providential events with God.*

*6<sup>thly</sup> That I will read this over every day or at least twice a week.*



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*God help me, enable me to cultivate a spirit of self denial and to yield myself a prisoner of love to the Redeemer of the world.*

*Amen & Amen*

What do you think of William Booth's personal covenant?

Try writing your own personal covenant. What would you need to do to help you keep to these promises?

## PRAY - Prayer liturgies for different contexts

Father God, as I have committed myself today to living in covenant with you, I ask first that you will forgive me those times when I have failed to keep my promises. I thank you that you are a God who forgives and who keeps on forgiving. Help me to receive your forgiveness today.

Father, I thank you that as Jesus entered the Most Holy Place he did so in order for me to have a conscience cleansed, and that I can enjoy the promised eternal inheritance into the future and today as I work out my calling here on Earth.

I thank you, Lord, that Jesus' death has set me free in order to live a life of freedom, experiencing something of the fulness of life which you have promised to us.

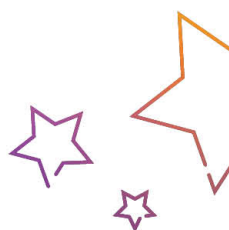
I thank you that even in the midst of the pain and suffering of the past year, you are alongside me, helping me to make it through each day. I pray now for those people known to me who continue to find these times a struggle. Help them to see a glimmer of your presence in their lives.

Father, I thank you that when you saved me you also called me to service. Help me to work out what serving the living God looks like for me. Help me to live the life of holiness to which you call me, to serve others in such a way that they cannot fail to be pointed to you.

Father, on this day I commit myself to living in covenant with you. I know that you will never fail to hold your side of the covenant I make today. Help me to be faithful to what I promise this day.

I pray this prayer in the precious name of Jesus.

Amen.



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## Appendix

### Sample Covenant Service Outline

- **SASB 613** 'O Jesus, I have promised'
- **Prayer Time**
- **Music** 'Guardian of my Soul' by Major Darren Shaw (video available to download from the [Resource Centre](#))
- **Bible reading** Jeremiah 31:31-34
- **Teaching**
- **The signing of a covenant** In the book of Nehemiah we see that in response to God journeying with his people, there is a willingness to make a covenant, a binding agreement with God. We also note that there was a desire to put this in writing, affixing their seal to it. (Nehemiah 9:38: 'In view of all this, we are making a binding agreement, putting it in writing, and our leaders, our Levites and our priests are affixing their seals to it.')
- As we have opportunity today to make a covenant with God, maybe adding your name in writing will help you to keep the promises made this day.
- **SASB 610** 'My life must be Christ's broken bread'
- **Benediction** Hebrews 13:20,21

