

**DAY 1 - (week beginning Mon 21<sup>st</sup> Jan 2019)****Read - Hebrews 9:14-15**

*I will be your God, and you will be my people.  
Lev 26:12*

“The Covenant” is the relationship between God and his people. It was expressed very simply in the words, “*I will be your God, and you will be my people*”. God offers to be Israel’s God in exchange for their love and obedience. This was pure grace, because human beings don’t deserve such love.

A covenant is really just a pact or agreement between people. We can think of it legally, but God’s Covenant is really about relationships. The simplest example would be “a family”. Family members are bound together, not just by blood, or by a legal obligation, but by a deep bond of love, caring and loyalty. This is why the Covenant is not just about me and God, it places us in a community of love. The “Life in all its fullness” which Jesus promises, can only be found in this kind of caring community. Isolated individuals cannot experience fullness of life. It is only in God’s Covenant community that we can reach our full potential and know the peace, wholeness and significance that God intends for us.

Also, it is only in community that we can understand the true nature of sin. Sin is not just an individual breaking the laws of God, sin is acting in ways that damage love and community.

God is an essential part of the community we are talking about. When we are in fellowship with him and in fellowship with our brothers and sisters, we are the family of God, and it is here that we find out what “life in all its fullness” truly means.

***Bind us together Lord, with cords that cannot be broken.***

**DAY 2****Read - Ephesians 2:11-22**

*On that day the Lord made a covenant with Abraham, and said... Gen 15:18*

God made several covenants with individuals in the Old Testament - with Noah (Gen 6:18) – with Abraham (Gen 15:18) – with Moses and the people of Israel (Exod 34:10) - with Joshua (Josh 24:14) - and with David (Ps 89:34-37).

All the covenants in the Bible have one thing in common, they are all established at the initiative of God. It is always an act of grace and love on God’s part. We are sinners and therefore unworthy of his love, but in his mercy and grace God reaches out to us and includes us. Unlike a covenant between persons or groups, which is a covenant between equals, God’s Covenant is between an utterly holy God on the one side, and totally undeserving men and women on the other. This is love. This is grace.

God never asks anyone’s permission to establish a covenant. He is our Creator. He offers us this love. Ours is simply to accept it or reject it. We owe our very existence to him and therefore his Covenant is binding upon us. We can reject it or refuse to obey it, but even so, ultimately, because he is God, we are accountable to it.

We are included in the Covenant by grace alone, never because we are worthy. We have to make a choice to accept God’s offer of friendship. It is his grace, love and acceptance that makes us worthy. The New Testament sometimes refers to this inclusion as “adoption”. We who had no “family” are now included in God’s family because God the Father has reached out to us.

***Thank you that I am your child and adopted into your family, Father.***

**DAY 3****Read - 1 Corinthians 2:6-10**

*No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has ever conceived what God has prepared for those who love him. v9*

God’s chief reason for establishing the Covenant is so that we may be blessed and have the fullness of life that he intended for us. He wants it to be a blessing, not an imposition. At the heart of every covenant of God is a promise. He is our loving Father and he wants the very best for us.

In the Old Testament, think of a covenant between two people for a moment. At the simplest level it created a bond of care and protection. If one was attacked the other would come to their aid. If one was in need of food or money, the other would help them. They could call on each other in a time of need.

If we expand this to God’s Covenant the same principles apply. We have his care, presence and protection. He will supply our true needs (not necessarily our wants!). More than this, we are accepted into his family. Our sins are forgiven and we can know true peace. We receive the fullness of life that he promised. Above all we receive his love.

However we should never follow God just for what we can get out of him, or just for what he can do for us. That is to love him for the wrong reasons. True faith never just “makes use of God”. We should always love him for his own sake with no ulterior motives. On his side, he wants to bless us, and he will. But that must never be our primary reason for following him.

***O bless me now my Saviour, I come to thee....***

## DAY 4

Read - Deut 30:11-20

*Now choose life, so that you and your children may live, and that you may love the Lord your God, listen to his voice, and hold fast to him. v20*

It is important to remind ourselves that God's purpose in the Covenant is always **life**. When we accept the obligations of the Covenant it is not to place a burden on us, but so that we may have life (Jn 10:10), life for ourselves, and so that we can pass that life on to others. There are four things that flow from this:

1. *We must obey Gods moral laws.* Life in the Covenant community is a life of righteousness. God is a holy God and we can only be in fellowship with him if we are seeking to be holy ourselves. This is also the only way to live in healthy relationships with others. To obey God's laws gives life. When we disobey we cut ourselves off from life.
2. *We must love.* We must love one another in the church and reach out to neighbours and the needy with that love. All the moral laws of God are kept when we truly love (Rom 13:9).
3. *We must be servants* who stay humble and do not seek high positions for ourselves, but are prepared even to take the lowest place to serve the needs of others. Remember Jesus is Lord, but he came as a servant (Jn 13:14-15).
4. Lastly, *we must be involved in God's mission.* God's will is to be in a Covenant relationship with the whole world (Jn 3:16). We share the task of inviting people into that fellowship of love – to let our light shine so that others will be drawn to him.

***Meditation: What is the fullness of life that God offers? How does it differ from ordinary life?***

## DAY 5

Read - Ephesians 2:1-10

*For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith – and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God – not by works, so that no one can boast. v8-9*

The Old Covenant with Moses was based on obedience to God's Law. It was supported by a system of sacrifices and temple worship which was designed to restore fellowship and communion with God when a person sinned. However it didn't really work. Firstly, people were not able to keep these laws because of their innate sinfulness. Secondly, the Jews developed such a legalistic attitude to the keeping of the Law that they lost sight of the real purpose of it all, which was to help us walk in loving fellowship with God within his community.

The New Covenant established by Jesus was based on God's grace, not Law. Jesus sacrificed his life on the cross so that our sins could be forgiven, and to restore fellowship with God. Keeping his laws and living righteous lives is still required of us, but the difference is that now we obey them out of gratitude for God's wonderful gift of forgiveness and grace, and not just from a sense of duty. The prophet Jeremiah prophesied that God would "*put his law within us, and write his laws on our hearts*" (Jer 31:33). The goal of the New Covenant is however exactly the same as the old one: that we should live in positive peace, love and harmony with God.

The old Covenant was sealed with the blood of a sacrificial animal. The New Covenant is sealed with something far more precious; the blood of Jesus shed on the cross.

***Amazing grace, how sweet the sound that saved a wretch like me!***

## DAY 6

Read - 2 Chronicles 7:11-16

*If my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and will heal their land. v14*

We have all made covenants with other people many times, and at various levels. We have made promises, we have signed contracts, some of us have made marriage vows, we have made commitments to our children, or our family, or our friends. We may even have made commitments to God. Some of these may be good and healthy commitments, some may not. It is a good thing, from time to time, to re-visit those covenants, examine ourselves deeply, and renew them, or maybe revise them.

There are several examples in the Old Testament of people renewing their Covenant. Joshua, before he died, urged people to renew their Covenant with God. God urged Israel, through Solomon, in the words quoted above, to renew their relationship with him in order to find healing for their land. King Josiah, when Israel's religion was in a very poor state, restored the book of the Covenant (Deuteronomy) and the whole nation renewed their Covenant with their Lord.

John Wesley, the founder of the Methodist Church, urged Methodists to renew their personal covenant with God every year. God does not change. But we do. We are weak and sinful. We try to keep our side but we often fall, neglect it, break it or back-slide. We need to renew our commitment to God regularly. I pray you will do so this year in the Covenant Service at your church.

***Take my life and let it be, consecrated Lord to thee...***