

*There is nothing so tragic as to see a life torn by loneliness and despair
in a place supposedly saturated by love.*

The consistent witness of all Scripture is that God wants to be in a _____
_____ with everyone. Covenant is God's idea, God's initiative, and God's
promise. It is unilateral. Humans are recipients, not contributors; we are not expected to
offer elements to the bond; we are called to accept it as offered, to keep it as demanded, and
to receive the results that God, as promised, assures will not be withheld. God determines
the covenant, and because he brought it into existence, he is central to our understanding
of it. The biblical narrative from Genesis to Revelation is about the covenant-initiating,
covenant-seeking God.

I. OLD TESTAMENT

Abrahamic Covenant

*After this, the word of the LORD came to Abram in a vision: "Do not be afraid, Abram. I
am your shield, your very great reward." But Abram said, "Sovereign LORD, what can
you give me since I remain childless and the one who will inherit my estate is Eliezer of
Damascus?" And Abram said, "You have given me no children; so a servant in my
household will be my heir." Then the word of the LORD came to him: "This man will not
be your heir, but a son who is your own flesh and blood will be your heir." He took him
outside and said, "Look up at the sky and count the stars—if indeed you can count
them." Then he said to him, "So shall your offspring be." Abram believed the LORD, and
he credited it to him as righteousness. Genesis 15:1–6*

The foundation of a covenant relationship is _____. The heart of worship, adoration,
praise, and thanksgiving to God begins here. Trust is an inner confidence toward another,
that a real relationship is possible.

Abraham (not Moses or David or Elijah or John the Baptist) is called _____—
the primary biblical model of one who lived faithfully in covenant with God through
faith/trust/obedience (Romans 4).

Mosaic/Sinai Covenant

*Now if you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all nations you will be my
treasured possession. Although the whole earth is mine, you will be for me a kingdom
of priests and a holy nation.' These are the words you are to speak to the Israelites.
Exodus 19:5–6*

God's covenant people are not called to be kings, but a kingdom of distinctive _____
and _____ of the covenant. Priests are not self-serving but intermediaries
between others and God—standing before others on behalf of God and before God on
behalf of others.

Davidic Covenant

Psalm 89 reveals the heart of the covenant-making, covenant-keeping God in two primary ways: _____ (*hesed*) and _____ (*'emunah*).

*I will sing of the Lord's great **love** forever; with my mouth I will make your **faithfulness** known through all generations. I will declare that your **love** stands firm forever, that you established your **faithfulness** in heaven itself. You said, "I have made a covenant with my chosen one, I have sworn to David my servant. I will establish your line forever and make your throne firm through all generations. Psalm 89:1-4*

These two words describing *covenant* are often found in the Psalms.

The New Covenant

Jeremiah proclaims God's promise of a new covenant relationship. Jeremiah is looking beyond his own day of broken covenant and sees a good day when people are living under a new, better covenant...not _____ written on stone tablets or scrolls of leather but on _____.

The days are coming," declares the LORD, "when I will make a new covenant with the people of Israel and with the people of Judah. It will not be like the covenant I made with their ancestors when I took them by the hand to lead them out of Egypt, because they broke my covenant, though I was a husband to them," declares the LORD. "This is the covenant I will make with the people of Israel after that time," declares the LORD. "I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people. No longer will they teach their neighbor, or say to one another, 'Know the LORD,' because they will all know me, from the least of them to the greatest," declares the LORD. "For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more. Jeremiah 31:31-34

Yahweh God is the source and originator of the entire covenant concept and phenomenon. He included the covenant relationship in his creation activity and handiwork. Covenant is germane to human life; it is God-implanted and -unfolded.

This covenant relationship is consistently expressed from Abraham through John the Baptist, the _____ of the old covenant. The biblical models of covenant relationships throughout the Old Testament affirm the importance and possibilities of meaningful, supportive, and mutually encouraging relationships in the body of Christ.

II. NEW TESTAMENT

A. John the Baptist

We often think of John the Baptist as a loner ("a voice crying out in the wilderness"). However, consider how John was connected in covenant relationships:

1. Josephus notes that the _____ adopted orphans of priests. As John's parents, Elizabeth and Zechariah, were older when he was born (Luke 1:7), it is quite possible John was orphaned at a young age and raised by the Essenes at

Qumran which is very near to where John baptized Jesus. The Essenes lived separate from the corrupt society and mixed only with each other, eating only food grown on Essene land, harvested by Essenes, and prepared by Essenes. Comparatively, that would be called a cloistered order.

2. In his public ministry, John the Baptist also had his own group of disciples:
 - John 1:35, "The next day again John was standing with two of his disciples...."
 - Luke 7:18, "The disciples of John told him all these things...."
 - Matthew 14:12, "And his disciples came and took the body and buried it...."
3. John kept the covenant! Not only did the multitudes seek him out of their spiritual hunger, Jesus honored him as the greatest "among those born of women" (Matthew 11:11)—greater than Abraham, Moses, David, all the prophets.
4. The practical implication of John 3:30 ("He must increase, and I must decrease.") is that John was faithful to the covenant before God and lived out the covenant with others, _____ his disciples to Jesus as he was _____ his life to prepare the way for the new covenant to be fulfilled.

B. Jesus

The Word became flesh (John 1:14) and revealed the glory of the covenant-initiating, covenant-seeking God. In the fullness of time, Jesus was born into a family, raised in the community of faith, and began his ministry by proclaiming the Kingdom of God, calling others to repent, believe and follow him (Mark 1:15). Almost immediately, he formed a _____ of men with whom he attempted to cultivate the close, personal, intimate relationship he has experienced eternally with the Father as revealed in John 17:22–23,

I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one - I in them and you in me - so that they may be brought to complete unity. Then the world will know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.

Dr. Robert "Clem" Coleman is peerless in explaining the eight guiding principles of Jesus' ministry (*The Master Plan of Evangelism*):

1. _____ —Jesus' method was *people*.
2. _____ —Jesus shared life with them.
3. _____ —Jesus demanded full surrender.
4. _____ —Jesus poured his life into the disciples.
5. _____ —Jesus modeled ministry through his life.
6. _____ —Jesus put them to work.
7. _____ —Jesus watched over them.
8. _____ —Jesus expected them to disciple others.

This band of disciples was a microcosm of the covenant community God desires for all humankind. The New Testament is the unfolding story of believers learning to live in (_____) covenant with God and live out (_____) the covenant with others in Christ in order to bring others into a relationship with God and others in the covenant community of faith.

Discipleship = COVENANT RELATIONSHIPS

C. Paul

So also Abraham “believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness.” Understand then, that those who have faith are children of Abraham. Scripture foresaw that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, and announced the gospel in advance to Abraham: “All nations will be blessed through you.” Galatians 3:6–8

Paul is pointing out that this covenant relationship with God is open to all who believe, not only for those of a certain ethnicity or legal status. The covenant-seeking, covenant-initiating God made himself known to Abraham so that this covenant relationship is open to anyone who trusts and obeys.

III. WESLEYAN TRADITION

A. The Genius of John Wesley

A biography of Adam Clarke (Methodist preacher and scholar during John Wesley’s lifetime) recounted Wesley’s insistence that class meetings were essential to the revival:

“From long experience I know the propriety of Mr. Wesley’s advice: ‘Establish class-meetings and form societies wherever you preach and have attentive hearers; for, wherever we have preached without doing so, the word has been like seed by the way-side.’ It was by this means we have been enabled to establish permanent and holy Churches over the world. Mr. Wesley saw the necessity of this from the beginning. Mr. Whitefield, when he separated from Mr. Wesley, did not follow it. What was the consequence? The fruit of Mr. Whitefield’s labor died with himself. Mr. Wesley’s remains and multiplies.”

The author then recounted his memory of a conversation between George Whitefield and John Pool, as it was related to him by Pool.

“Whitefield: Well, John, art thou still a Wesleyan?”

“Pool: Yes, sir. I thank God I have the privilege of being in connection with Mr. Wesley, and one of his preachers.

“Whitefield: John, thou art in thy right place. My brother Wesley acted wisely; the souls that were awakened under his ministry he joined in class, and thus preserved the fruits of his labor. This I neglected, and my people are a rope of sand.”

Wesley’s discipleship model: _____

The “class meeting” became a crucial tool for enabling Methodists to “watch over one another in love,” to support and encourage one another in their lives with God. In fact, Wesley thought the oversight and support that the class meeting provided was so important that it became a _____ in a Methodist society. To be a Methodist meant that you were involved in a weekly class meeting.

A _____ is a group of three to five people who read together, pray together, and meet together to help one another grow in the fullness of Jesus Christ in this life (*New Room*

Bands, 13). Suggested pattern: Weekly check-in, daily commitments, questions of one another, prayer.

B. The Essence of Faith Communities

As Dietrich Bonhoeffer explained (*Life Together*, 21), Christian community means (1) a Christian needs others because of Jesus, (2) a Christian comes to others only through Jesus, and (3) the covenant community is a divine reality, the visible fellowship with other believers. We are saved and sanctified covenant faith communities.

“The pursuit of holiness and the vitality of churches in our day requires a recovery of the practice of Christian discipline. Such discipline can be recovered by retreat to narrowly intentional communities.....Real community is not homogeneity. It is the discipline and devotion of disparate people bearing with one another in the hard tasks of love.”
Richard Neuhaus (*Freedom of Ministry*, 127)

The church is at its best when covenant relationships (_____) are at the heart and practice of the community. The key word is _____. The primary responsibility of Christian leadership is to be intentional in creating a culture of covenant-keeping relationships that enable disciples of Jesus to live holy, healthy, fruitful lives in the “in between”—between Sundays, between meetings, between conferences, between this present moment and the parousia.

The German philosopher Frederich Nietzsche wrote with great clarity, “The essential thing in heaven and earth is... that there should be _____; there thereby results, and has always resulted in the long run, something which has made life worth living” (*Beyond Good and Evil*, 106).

C. The Purpose of the Francis Asbury Society

“Sometimes people ask “What is the Francis Asbury Society?” But that is not quite the right question. The question should be

Who is the Francis Asbury Society?.... the Francis Asbury Society is people, a group of people who have one common goal, the goal that brought Francis Asbury to these shores in 1771, and kept him here crisscrossing America for 45 years. What was, and is, that goal? It is to “exalt Jesus Christ by spreading Scriptural holiness around the world through publishing, speaking, and discipleship, so that persons are transformed to live ‘wholly devoted to God.’”
John Oswalt

The purpose of the _____ is to provide and promote an identifiable community of men and women who are committed to holiness of heart and life, edifying relationships and spiritual renewal in the church, across the nation and around the world. I.e., We are all about connecting people in covenant relationships with Jesus and each other.