

THE  
PRESENT WORD

ADULT LEADER'S GUIDE

SUMMER 2019  
LIVING IN COVENANT

## ABOUT THE WRITER

**BETH HERRINTON-HODGE** is a teaching elder and certified Christian educator in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). Beth works at Louisville Presbyterian Theological Seminary as director of the Academic Support Center. She is also a freelance writer and editor. Beth lives in Shelbyville, Kentucky, with her husband, Jay Hodge. They parent two teenage daughters and three black rescue dogs.

## COMING NEXT QUARTER

The fall quarter focuses on God's gift of faith and how we respond to it both personally and communally. The sessions from the Old and New Testaments illuminate how God's grace affects the lives of all believers, as demonstrated by their obedience, gratitude, and holy living.

Unit I, "God Is Faithful"

Unit II, "Responses to God's Faithfulness"

Unit III, "Faith Leads to Holy Living"

© 2019 Geneva Press

Published in partnership with the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), the Cumberland Presbyterian Church, The Moravian Church in America (North and South), the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), and the United Church of Christ.

*The Present Word* is published quarterly by Geneva Press, 100 Witherspoon St., Louisville, KY 40202-1396.

*All rights reserved.* No part of this book may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, recording, or by any information storage or retrieval system, without permission in writing from the publisher. For information, address Geneva Press, 100 Witherspoon Street, Louisville, Kentucky 40202-1396.

The ADULT LEADER'S GUIDE is based on *International Sunday School Lessons: International Bible Lessons for Christian Teaching*, copyright © 2007 by the Committee on the Uniform Series, and uses the New Revised Standard Version of the Bible, copyright © 1989 by the Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America; both used by permission.

Printed in the United States of America



# ADULT LEADER’S GUIDE

## LIVING IN COVENANT

A Note from the Editor . . . . .	2
The Text in Context. . . . .	3
Teaching Tips . . . . .	5
Resources to Help the Leader. . . . .	8

### Editor

Mark D. Hinds

### Writer

Beth Herrinton-Hodge

### Cover

Jesus teaches the multitudes in his Sermon on the Mount.

Artist Gisele Bauche, Saskatoon, Sk, Canada; e-mail: gbauche@sasktel.net; website: spiritualityandart.ca/.

## Unit I: A Fulfilled Covenant

1. June 2	Jesus Institutes the New Covenant . . . . .	9
	<i>Mark 14:12–31; Hebrews 8</i>	
2. June 9	Jesus Seals the New Covenant . . . . .	14
	<i>Mark 14:32–50; 15</i>	
3. June 16	The New Covenant’s Sacrifice . . . . .	19
	<i>Hebrews 9:11–28</i>	
4. June 23	Hearts United in Love. . . . .	24
	<i>Colossians 2:1–15</i>	

## Unit II: : A Heartfelt Covenant

5. June 30	Jesus Teaches about Right Attitudes . . . . .	29
	<i>Matthew 5:1–12</i>	
6. July 7	Jesus Teaches about Fulfilling the Law . . . . .	34
	<i>Matthew 5:13–20</i>	
7. July 14	Jesus Teaches Us to Love One Another. . . . .	39
	<i>Matthew 5:21–32</i>	
8. July 21	Jesus Teaches about Transforming Love. . . . .	44
	<i>Matthew 5:38–48</i>	
9. July 28	Jesus Teaches about Spiritual Discernment. . . . .	49
	<i>Matthew 7:1–6, 15–23</i>	

## Unit III: Covenant: A Personal Perspective

10. August 4	A Covenant between Friends . . . . .	54
	<i>1 Samuel 18–20</i>	
11. August 11	A Mother-Daughter Covenant . . . . .	59
	<i>Ruth 1:1–18</i>	
12. August 18	A Covenant to Marry . . . . .	64
	<i>Ruth 1:6–18; 3–4; Matthew 19:1–12</i>	
13. August 25	Marriage: A Covenant of Mutual Love . . . . .	69
	<i>Ephesians 5:21–6:4</i>	



# A Note from the Editor

Dear Partner in Educational Ministry,

We believe that God has chosen to come to us and enter into a relationship with us. We see this in the covenant that God makes with Abraham and Sarah and their descendants. We see the covenant reconfirmed as the people of Israel enter the Promised Land after God frees them from slavery in Egypt. We see the covenant expanded through Jesus Christ to include the church and, through the church, the world. The covenant is the relationship God has established with us and is the basis for our relationships with one another. To understand covenant is to understand what it is to be God's covenant people.

A covenant is a pact, an agreement, or a contract. From the faith perspective, the basic understanding of a covenant is that it is a relationship. In marriage, a couple defines their relationship by making vows to each other and promising commitment of a lifelong love. This is a covenant in the truest sense of the word.

God loves you and will never fail you. That is the message of covenant. May you be blessed in the knowledge of God's love through Jesus Christ during this quarter's study.

Mark D. Hinds

Editor



# The Text in Context

This quarter's focus on covenant explores how people live the new covenant revealed in Christ. In Matthew's Gospel, Jesus announces that his coming fulfills the law and covenant established by God (Matthew 5:17). Jesus gives full meaning to God's law and covenant. His teaching emphasizes the deep, underlying messages of the gospel. Jesus' same message is continued through the writings of the apostle Paul and the writer of Hebrews. Relationships of faith empower us to live God's covenant and to spread the gospel message.

The first four sessions comprise Unit I, "A Fulfilled Covenant." Jesus reveals new signs of the covenant for Jewish and Gentile believers, as recorded in Matthew, Mark, Luke, Hebrews, and Colossians: his body and blood, his death and resurrection.

Session 1 explores Mark's account of the Last Supper when Jesus explains to the disciples that he will initiate a new covenant through his pending death.

Session 2 follows Jesus' sealing the new covenant through his death, forever reconciling God and humankind.

In session 3, Paul explains the sign of the covenant as a relationship of the heart between God and God's people—a sign sealed with Christ's blood and not by circumcision.

The words to the church of Colossae, studied in session 4, challenge Christ's followers not to be deceived by false teachers but to root their lives and their faith in the fullness of Christ.

Matthew's account of Jesus' Sermon on the Mount fills the sessions of Unit II, "A Heartfelt Covenant." These five sessions show how Jesus gives new meaning and purpose to the law as he preaches the transforming righteousness of the kingdom.

Session 5 focuses on the Beatitudes in which Jesus proclaims a value system that completely reverses the world's values.

In session 6, Jesus urges his followers to make a difference in the world by bringing salt and light where there is darkness and struggle.

Sessions 7 and 8 focus on a familiar saying of Jesus, "You have heard that it was said, . . . But I say to you, . . ." Jesus repeats this saying as he refutes strict adherence to the letter of the law in favor of discerning God's will for living according to the law of love. Jesus challenges the external observance of God's law separated from an internal transformation rooted in love for God and one another.

Spiritual discernment is the focus of session 9 where Christ's followers are encouraged to refrain from judging others. Believers are called to pursue truth, do the will of God, and bear good fruit in God's world.

In Unit III, "Covenant: A Personal Perspective," four sessions focus on personal—covenantal—relationships between people in 1 Samuel, Ruth, and Ephesians. These final sessions show how our relationships continue the work of Christ Jesus by spreading the gospel message in the ways we love and support one another.

The relationships between Saul, David, and Jonathan are the focus of session 10 where loyalty to a friend supersedes loyalty and obedience to family.

Sessions 11 and 12 follow Naomi and Ruth from their challenges of loss, through their deep loyalty and companionship, to Ruth's marriage to the kinsman-redeemer and companion Boaz.

After Christ established the New Testament church, relationships between people are now based on their relationship with Christ Jesus. In session 13, the Letter to the Ephesians offers guidance for the relationship between husbands and wives based on the model and relationship that Christ has with his church.



# Teaching Tips

Bigger isn't always better. There's something to be said for being small.

In schools, small class sizes mean more individualized attention and easier access to tailored learning. In smaller businesses, customers are valued, and service is more personalized. In small churches, small classes, and small groups, people are known, embraced, and needed.

Many large churches have discovered the value of small groups and classes. Often, churches structure their community as a network of small, intimate groups in which people study, serve, pray, and grow in faith.

In small groups, relationships are fostered, and trust is built. People become community for one another, like family. There is a sense of connection. People care for one another and take care of each other. When someone misses a gathering, people within a small group notice it. When someone is in need, their small group rallies around them.

Ministry in small groups is biblical. In Exodus 18:13-27, Moses was overwhelmed with the responsibility of leading God's people in the wilderness and judging disputes between people. His father-in-law Jethro suggested that Moses appoint a small group of helpers—judges—with whom he could share his work.

In the Gospels, from the crowds of people who pressed around him, Jesus called twelve to be his disciples. These twelve followed him, learned from him, and supported him.

Many of the groups that use *The Present Word* have a handful of members. Our writers and lesson developers are learning to take this reality into account when preparing the Leader's Guide and Student's Book. It can be frustrating to read session instructions that call for forming "three to five small groups" when there are only three participants in the class. Designing an activity that calls for participants to sing together can be intimidating for a group of four. In response, leaders will now find session suggestions and instructions designed for small groups of participants. A few of the changes include:

### *Reading Scripture*

As always, each session in *The Present Word* begins with reading Scripture. In smaller groups of learners, the leader or a volunteer may simply read aloud the text for the session. Perhaps one member of the group enjoys reading Scripture aloud and can be enlisted as your weekly reader. Alternatively, individuals in the group may read the text silently before the session activity begins. Some session suggestions involve the whole group in a Reader's Theater-style reading, where participants volunteer to read different parts of the text. Participants are free to read more than one "part" in this style of reading.

### *Role play and movement activities*

Space considerations and participants' physical abilities may limit the activity and movement that can be used in a session. Role play activities can be adjusted to a Reader's Theater-style reading, with parts read aloud instead of role played. A *More Ideas* section at the end of each session in the Leader's Guide offers additional ideas that can be substituted into the session. Feel free to improvise or omit the more active suggestions according to the needs of your group.

### *Music and singing*

Many participants bring a rich appreciation of music and hymns, but learning spaces are not always equipped with a piano or hymnals. Not every group includes a musician who feels confident to lead a hymn. When hymns or songs are suggested in a session, gauge your group's comfort with singing. Reading aloud a hymn or song as one would read a poem is an option.

### *Discussions and personal sharing*

Each session's activities include a number of questions for group discussion. Often, questions build upon previous queries to lead participants into deeper discussion. Leaders have the freedom to use or disregard suggested discussion questions. Once in a while, session activities encourage participants to form pairs for personal discussion. These activities are used when the discussion topics may ask participants to tell about personal experiences that they may not be comfortable disclosing in a larger group. Individual participants always



have the option to “pass” on a discussion topic or question. Leaders may use their discretion in choosing to form pairs for personal sharing, to encourage discussion by the whole group, or to omit a particular activity.

*The Present Word* session materials are provided to guide and inform both participants and leaders as you encounter Scripture. It is our hope that these teaching tips, coupled with minor curriculum changes, will enhance and build on the strengths of learning in smaller groups.



# Resources to Help the Leader

The following resources are suggested for those who are interested in doing additional research and study.

## **Bible Commentary Series**

*Interpretation Bible Studies* series. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1998–2008.

*New Daily Study Bible*, by William Barclay. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2017.

*The New Testament for Everyone* series, by N. T. Wright. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2004–2015.

*The Old Testament for Everyone* series, by John Goldingay. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2016.

## **Bible Dictionaries**

*Eerdmans Dictionary of the Bible*. Edited by David Noel Freedman. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2000.

*Harper's Bible Dictionary*. Edited by Paul J. Achtemeier. San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1985.

## **Single Book Commentaries**

*The Bible from Scratch: The New Testament for Beginners*, by Donald L. Griggs. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2002.

*The Bible from Scratch: The Old Testament for Beginners*, by Donald L. Griggs. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2003.

## **Worship Leaflets**

Geneva Press offers *The Present Word* quarterly Worship Leaflets. Each leaflet includes a brief service of worship with prayers, hymn texts, and opportunities for reflection on the Scripture passage for the day. Additionally, that session's Scripture passage is printed on the leaflet in a format conducive to a responsive reading. Order your quarterly *Present Word* Worship Leaflets at [pcusastore.com](http://pcusastore.com).

## 1

## AT A GLANCE

**Gathering**

1. Greet the learners.
2. Open with prayer.

**Exploring**

3. Covenants.
4. Written on the heart.
5. Body and blood.
6. Better covenant, better promises.

**Responding**

7. Written on my heart.
8. Close with prayer.

**RESOURCES NEEDED**

- Bibles
- Student's Book
- Worship Leaflets for session 1 (*optional*)
- Name tags, pens

# Jesus Institutes the New Covenant

## BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE

Mark 14:12–31; Hebrews 8

## A VERSE TO REMEMBER

Jesus has now obtained a more excellent ministry, and to that degree he is the mediator of a better covenant, which has been enacted through better promises.

—Hebrews 8:6

## TEACHING POINTS

### The session invites learners:

1. To tell how Jesus is the initiator of the new covenant predicted by the prophets and illustrated in the Lord's Supper.
2. To appreciate one's standing and relationship with Christ because of the new covenant.
3. To approach the Lord's Supper with greater reverence and awe for the Christ of the new covenant.



## PREPARING TO LEAD

The meal that Jesus shared with his friends was held on the first night of Passover. This feast recalls and celebrates the liberation of the Hebrew people from slavery in Egypt. In hosting the Last Supper on this night, Jesus links the liberation of the Hebrews with the freedom of all people that he secures by his death and resurrection.

The words Jesus uses when he shares the bread and cup, “This is my body” and “This is my blood,” echo the words of the Passover liturgy: “This is the bread of affliction which our ancestors ate in the land of Egypt.” The blood of Jesus shed in

death seals the new covenant. The shared cup at the Last Supper also looks forward to the great feast to come in the kingdom of God.

The new covenant in Jesus Christ means this: Even though we have broken faith with God, God will not break faith with us. God will bring hope where there is no hope and life out of death. God will make a way where there is no way. God will wash away the people's sins once and for all and remember them no more.



## SPIRITUAL PRACTICE

Read and reflect on Jeremiah 31:31–34 and God's promise to write the new covenant on the heart. How does your heart lead you in following Jesus and loving God?



## LEADING THE SESSION

### Gathering

1. Greet the learners.
  - Make class members and any guests feel welcome.
  - Provide **name tags** and **pens** as people arrive.
  - If appropriate, provide simple refreshments; ask volunteers to bring refreshments for the next few sessions.
  - Agree on and review simple ground rules and organization (for example, time to begin and end, welcoming of all points of view, confidentiality, and so on).
  - Encourage participants to bring their **Student's Books** and **Bibles**.
  - Are there ways that you can make the learners more comfortable?



**My Notes:**

---

2. Open with prayer.

Lead the group using the **Worship Leaflet** for the session (see Resources to Help the Leader), or offer an opening prayer or song of your choice.



**My Notes:**

---

## Exploring

### 3. Covenants.

Have participants review “A Word about Covenant” (**Student’s Book**, pp. 4–5) to identify the meaning and significance of covenants in the Bible. Discuss:

- Why is it important to remember the sweep of God’s promises throughout the Old Testament, culminating in Jesus Christ as the new covenant?
- How are biblical covenants similar to solemn promises people make today?
- What signs or symbols are used to mark covenants and promises today?



**My Notes:**

---

### 4. Written on the heart.

Have volunteers each read one verse of Jeremiah 31:31–34. Pause after the reading of each verse to discuss these two questions before moving on to the next verse.

- What promises are explicit or implicit in this verse?
- How does this verse reveal how God has been or can be experienced in life?



**My Notes:**

---

### 5. Body and blood.

Invite volunteers to read Mark 14:17–26. Use details from Preparing to Lead to inform your discussion. Ask:

- How did Jesus’ broken body and poured-out blood initiate a new covenant?

Invite participants to discuss your faith tradition’s beliefs about the Lord’s Supper. Compare Jesus’ words at the Last Supper with the Lord’s Supper words used in your congregation. Ask:

- What does the Lord’s Supper mean to you? In what ways does it strengthen and nourish your faith?



**My Notes:**

---

**6. Better covenant, better promises.**

Have volunteers read Hebrews 8:6–7, 10–12. Review “A Lesson about Our Relationship with Christ” (**Student’s Book**, pp. 6–7). Discuss:

- What does it mean to you to be redeemed and forgiven by God in Jesus Christ?
- According to Hebrews 8, what better covenant and better promises does Jesus mediate?



**My Notes:**

---

**Responding**

**7. Written on my heart.**

When we say we know something by heart, it often means to have something memorized and repeatable by rote. Jeremiah 31:31–34, however, suggests a more profound meaning: God will place the covenant within us. Challenge participants to identify ways in which the church’s worship, education, mission, and fellowship can be accomplished so that the covenant with God is not “rote” but an expression of love. Discuss:

- In what ways does your life/the life of our church reflect the new covenant that is written on your heart?
- How do people you know and meet see the new covenant alive in you / in our church?
- What can we do in the next week to show that the law of love has been written on our hearts?

Invite participants to choose and practice one of the identified ways in the following week.



**My Notes:**

---

**8.** Close with prayer.

Use this prayer from the **Student's Book** or a prayer of your choice:

Lord Jesus Christ, thank you for giving yourself for our salvation. Thank you for being the new covenant for us, the one who has fulfilled God's promises. Thank you for giving your body and blood for us. Give us the comfort of your presence with us. Make us your faithful disciples who proclaim your gospel by our words and deeds. Help us always to point to you, the Son of God, who has loved us and given yourself for us. Hear our prayers, O Christ, and use us for your service. Amen.



**My Notes:**

---



## **MORE IDEAS**

1. Invite a minister to tell about what it was like to officiate at the Lord's Supper for the first time. How did the experience change the way the minister approaches this sacred act?
2. Volunteer to prepare Communion dishes and elements (bread and drink) for your congregation. Consider your part in the covenant as you make your preparations.
3. Brainstorm ways people publicly proclaim and remember their promises: wearing a wedding ring, reciting the pledge of allegiance, and so on. What do these acts and symbols do for those who participate in them? How do we proclaim and remember our relationship with God through Christ?