



Prayer: Dear God we adore you and give thanks for the ways you have blessed our lives. Thank you for being a promise keeper and a covenant maker. Please help us to live faithfully as covenant people. In the name of Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior. Amen

Connect to God:

Where have you seen God at work in your life this week?

Connect to Neighbor:

What good have you done for someone else this week?

Connect to Scripture: Genesis 15:1-12, 17-21

15 After these events, the Lord's word came to Abram in a vision, "Don't be afraid, Abram. I am your protector.^[a] Your reward will be very great."

2 But Abram said, "Lord God, what can you possibly give me, since I still have no children? The head of my household is Eliezer, a man from Damascus."^[b] **3** He continued, "Since you haven't given me any children, the head of my household will be my heir."

4 The Lord's word came immediately to him, "This man will not be your heir. Your heir will definitely be your very own biological child." **5** Then he brought Abram outside and said, "Look up at the sky and count the stars if you think

you can count them." He continued, "This is how many children you will have." **6** Abram trusted the Lord, and the Lord recognized Abram's high moral character.

7 He said to Abram, "I am the Lord, who brought you out of Ur of the Chaldeans to give you this land as your possession."

8 But Abram said, "Lord God, how do I know that I will actually possess it?"

9 He said, "Bring me a three-year-old female calf, a three-year-old female goat, a three-year-old ram, a dove, and a young pigeon." **10** He took all of these animals, split them in half, and laid the halves facing each other, but he didn't split the birds. **11** When vultures swooped down on the carcasses, Abram waved them off. **12** After the sun set, Abram slept deeply. A terrifying and deep darkness settled over him.

17 After the sun had set and darkness had deepened, a smoking vessel with a fiery flame passed between the split-open animals. **18** That day the Lord cut a covenant with Abram: "To your descendants I give this land, from Egypt's river to the great Euphrates, **19** together with the Kenites, the Kenizzites, the Kadmonites, **20** the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Rephaim, **21** the Amorites, the Canaanites, the Girgashites, and the Jebusites."

Connect Text in Context:

I am thankful for Nathaniel Metz who wrote the small group curriculum while I grieved and

attended to business related to the passing of my father. In our text today, Abram is asking the question, what is the point of acquiring more stuff if I don't have a natural-born son to pass it on to once I die?

In Genesis 12:1-3, God makes three promises: land, a great nation, and great name, and blessed to be a blessing to all the earth. For Abram's descendants to become a great nation, he would need a biological son to pass on his legacy. A great nation would need land to flourish. The purpose of the great nation was to be a blessing to all of the nations of the earth.

In Genesis 15, God reminds Abram of the promises mentioned in chapter twelve. This time God cuts a covenant with Abram. **"A covenant is a formal agreement or treaty between two parties that establishes a relationship and in which obligations and mutual responsibilities may be enacted. Many biblical covenants are found some providing only divine promises while others entail obligations."**

The Lord God cuts the covenant through the rite of sacrifice. God walks through the divided animal carcasses which represent God's signature. The amazing thing is that God does not require Abram to walk through the carcasses. God takes the divine initiative while Abram acts as a witness. The covenant provides Abram with assurance that God's promises will come to pass. The covenant acts a means of grace.

Connect to Practice:

Sometimes, we need to be reminded of God's promises. Religious rites, sacraments, in particular, baptism and communion help us remember God's promises and that we are in covenant with God.

Through the sacrament of communion, we are reminded that God has established a new covenant through Jesus' sacrificial act for us on the cross. Just as God takes the divine initiative

by cutting a covenant by walking through the animal carcasses, Jesus does that by acting as both sacrifice and high priest. As a sacrifice Jesus makes atonement for our sins by paying a price that we could not afford to pay. As a side note, this act meant animal sacrifice was no longer necessary. Therefore, Jesus works for the healing of not only humanity but all of creation. I am sure this is good news for animal lovers.

As a high priest, he mediates the blessings of God to us. During our communion liturgy, we refer to the cup as the cup of the new covenant. All those who profess their faith in Jesus Christ have access to the promises of the new covenant. Through the new covenant, God promises that we will be members of the Kingdom of God. We are not promised that our names will be great, but we are called to fulfill the great commission. God wants us to possess the land by sharing the good news so that the territory of the heart is filled with God's love. The good news is that Jesus loves all of creation and we are all chosen people.

Connect Heads:

Define the word “covenant” in your own words.

What covenants are you involved in?

Is there a particular insight that you would like to share from the sermon, from the scripture, or from the small group curriculum?

Connect Heart:

Share a time when someone failed to meet the obligations and responsibilities associated with a covenant between you and them. What did you learn about God? Yourself? Others?

Share a time when you experienced the fulfillment of God’s promises in your life. What did you learn about God? Yourself? Others?

How do sacraments (outwards signs of inward grace) remind us of God’s covenant with us?

Connect Hands:

Did you cause harm in word or deed to someone this week? (self-examination). If so, confess your sin to God, then seek to reconcile with your brother or sister.

Share your prayer concerns and celebrations.

Ask a member of the group to pray for the concerns and give thanks for the celebrations.

Notes Sections

Prayer Concerns:

Celebrations:

Daily Reflection Questions

Where have I seen God at work in my life today?

What is one thing that I am thankful for?

What is one thing that broke my heart today?

What is one good thing did I do for someone else today?