



LIFEGROUP STUDY

Riverlife
BAPTIST CHURCH

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**This is the
covenant I will
establish with the
people of Israel,
after that time,
declares the Lord.**

**I will put my laws
in their minds and
write them on
their hearts.**

**I will be their God,
and they will be
my people.**

**HEBREWS 8:10
(NIV)**

Introduction

God is wonderful! At Riverlife, we have been so blessed by God as we have sought to seek His presence together as family. He has answered our prayers that we might be a people empowered by His presence and have the honour of being able to 'show and tell' His great love to those around us.

We believe that as we grow and step into all that He has for us at Riverlife, our sense of commitment to God and each other becomes central to the work He wants to do through us. We believe that the biblical idea of 'covenant' reflects this mutually-beneficial relationship and commitment between us and God. It is entirely imbalanced: we received so much more than we ever give; but it's a two-way street regardless! God is inviting us into a deeper relationship with Him, into a committed 'covenant' relationship.

This series of group studies is part of a wider church series called 'Covenant', aimed at bringing us together as a family, committed to each other and to God, hungry to see His kingdom break into our lives, families, communities and the world! As part of that, these studies are designed to be used in conjunction with the six Sunday messages from the Covenant series, and the five weeks of Covenant Daily Devotions that also help expand on these ideas. The studies presume that people have watched or listened to the messages and have read through the first few days of the devotions and will build on those as part of the group session. Please encourage your group members to be engaging with both the sermon content and daily devotions before coming to the group times. The greatest impact will happen when

everyone brings reflections, experiences and questions into the group space.

We trust that God will bring a fresh awareness of His love for you and those around you as we journey into covenant together.

YOU CAN FIND ALL THE
RESOURCES YOU NEED
TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS
MATERIAL AT

[www.riverlifechurch.org.
au/covenant](http://www.riverlifechurch.org.au/covenant)

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*Hard copies of the
Life Group Studies are
available from the
church office or at the
Information Desk on
Sundays.*

A Note to Life Group Leaders

Leading a Life Group is a big task, and we want to make this as easy as possible for you to create a space where people can engage with this material. We have prepared these materials to help you facilitate your Life Group meetings to help ground this idea of covenant, and everyone's active involvement in this covenant community. As you prepare and facilitate this material, prayerfully consider how this will best work for the members of your group, and how they may need to be invited and challenged to reflect these values and practices in their daily life.

As a leader, we've provided some tips at the start of each session, that will help you prepare and facilitate the session. Make sure you have pre-read the notes for the whole session, thought about how you can help challenge your group members, and how you yourself will respond and model what God is inviting us into.

Some weeks will require preparation of group activities, so make sure that you organise these adequately for the whole group. Also ensure that each member of your group has access to:

- + A study booklet
- + A Bible
- + A digital copy of the daily devotions
- + The Riverlife Church website to watch or listen to the messages and podcasts.

Thanks for investing time into your group, and for journeying with our church family as we seek to live out God's covenant with us.

The Riverlife Leadership Team

God and Us

Leader Notes

Before the Group Meeting

- + Contact the group members before the day of the meeting and remind them to review the sermon online, and keep up with the devotions
- + Read through this material
- + Pray for the group members and session
- + The 'Putting it Into Practice' section at the end of this session is to spend time taking communion together. Ensure that you have the required elements for taking communion (taking into consideration any dietary requirements for your group members). You may even want to incorporate this into a whole meal together if that is practical for your group.

Welcome and Catch Up

What was one thing that stood out from the previous week, either devotion, sermon or last week's study?

Thinking Things Through

A covenant is an agreement between two parties. As we have already seen this week, there are all sorts of covenants in the world around us. There are even several different covenants in the Bible! In this series, when we talk about covenant, we're not talking about different covenantal theologies, or other things like that. What we mean when we say covenant in this context is the committed relationship between us and God,

made at God's instigation through the Son, Jesus. This covenant has consequences in our relationship with God, and consequences for our relationships with each other, both in and out of our church context.

This week, we're focussing on the part of this covenant that is between us and God. Because a covenant has blessings and implications for those who are a part of it, it's important for us to know about God's promises to us. God promises that we will be in His family, that He will be our saviour, provider, protector, comforter, teacher, and a whole lot more! He promises that He will be with us (His presence, the Holy Spirit); He invites us to be known intimately by Him and know Him the same way; that we will have freedom from the brokenness in our lives; and that we will find purpose, blessing and life in Him. All we need to do in return is to love and obey Him. Sounds like a good deal!

Read Hebrews 8:8-12 together.

This passage speaks about the new covenant that was promised, and then put into place through Jesus. What an amazing promise! It has the vertical aspect of this covenant, connection with God: "I will be their God, and they shall be my people." But there's a horizontal aspect as well: 'they' is plural. He's our God! We're His people! As we progress through this series, we'll unpack some of those things, but it's important to note here that we have a covenant with God, but it also connects us all together when we are a part of His people. And so, we come together and respond to Him. We'll learn how we respond actively with our presence within the meeting of this covenant community, how we serve God by serving each other, and how we live sacrificially generous lives toward each other and His church because of God's great love for us.

You and Me

Leader Notes

Before the Group Meeting

- + Contact the group members before the day of the meeting and remind them to review the sermon online, and keep up with the devotions
- + Read through this material
- + Pray for the group members and session
- + The 'Putting it Into Practice' section at the end of this session has the group engaging in a practical act of service for each other. Choose either to wash each other's hands or feet. Prepare appropriately-sized bowls of warm water, some liquid soap, and enough towels for the group. Have these set aside and ready to go for the end of the group time.

Welcome and Catch Up

What was one thing that stood out from the previous week, either devotion, sermon or last week's study?

Thinking Things Through

As we explored last week, the covenant we participate in with God has not only the vertical element, but a horizontal element. The Bible writers expressed this through several metaphors and analogies: like a body, like a marriage, as a family. We are connected at a deep level, beyond such immediate and surface things like appearance, agreement and preference. In fact, when the writer of Ephesians, Paul, speaks about the

connection between us all as followers of Jesus, he says that we've been all participants in the same thing: one baptism, the one faith, we have one Father, and it's all through one Lord, Jesus. When we say 'yes' to Jesus, we are saying yes to all those who have also said 'yes' to Jesus!

This can pose a bit of a dilemma for some of us: we love Jesus, but find ourselves saying, "I don't remember signing up to be in a relationship with all these other people! I don't know a lot of them, and there's some that I do know that I'm not very fond of." This dilemma is particularly evident in today's culture. We usually gather around like-minded people, who have shared interests, backgrounds, culture and practices to us. Yet, Jesus came to break down these false divisions between people. We are all created in the image of our Creator God, and yet sin and brokenness have caused us to separate, withdraw and focus only on our own needs and the needs of those closest to us.

Read John 13:3-20, 31-35 together.

This is where our covenant with God becomes challenging and powerful. As God works in our hearts and lives, we begin to reflect the life of Jesus. He included the poor and the powerful; He connected with the outcast and oppressors. He came so that everyone would receive the invitation to be in this covenant. This is part of the miraculous work of God by His Holy Spirit in our lives: we begin to look beyond our own needs, our own preferences and prejudices. We begin to become blind to cultural barriers and personal preferences. We begin to find ourselves weeping when someone is weeping and celebrating when they are celebrating. Entering a covenant relationship with God means we enter a covenant relationship with His people, and we

find ourselves included and loved. Jesus made it clear: “Love each other, as I have first loved you” (John 13:34).

🔍 Deeper Thoughts

- + Loving each other seems to go against so much of what we see in the world around us. Putting someone else’s needs before our own requires such a sacrifice. Who are people that encourage you in this area by the way they live?
- + What would it look like for you to live out some of those practices and principles in your life? What, if anything, would need to change?
- + Part of being one body is that we support each other in times of suffering and celebrate together in times of success. How have you experienced this in your walk with Jesus?
- + People tend to gather around agreement and separate through disagreement. But we are connected beyond agreement. The Holy Spirit is the connection we have through this covenant with God. How do you need Holy Spirit to work in you to be able to fully enter this covenant relationship with other people? This might be an opportunity to allow Holy Spirit to do some business with you in your heart, to more fully reflect the heart of Jesus.

Present

Leader Notes

Before the Group Meeting

- + Contact the group members before the day of the meeting and remind them to review the sermon online, and keep up with the devotions
- + Read through this material
- + Pray for the group members and session
- + The 'Putting it Into Practice' section at the end of this session has the group engaging in a commitment towards being more present. Make sure you reflect on what you'll personally commit to and be ready to share your answer.

Welcome and Catch Up

What was one thing that stood out from the previous week, either devotion, sermon or last week's study?

Was there a particular Covenant Challenge from this last week where you have seen God already bless the church community?

Thinking Things Through

Last week we looked at the idea that entering a covenant relationship with God means we enter a covenant relationship with His people. We concluded that it was here in this community of believers that we find ourselves included and loved. The implication of being in covenant with not only God but also

one another, means that there are some practical outworkings of this covenant.

The first of these that we will explore this week is to be 'present'. Being present really has a two-fold meaning. The first is that we are practically present with other believers, committing ourselves to come regularly to church so that we might invest into relationships, help one another out and serve and minister to one another through the gifts that God has given to us. The sad reality in many churches, including Riverlife, is that people's frequency of attendance is dropping off. The Bible encourages however "not to give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another" (Hebrews 10:25).

Of course, life is busy, and in today's culture, we are under ever-increasing time demands. However, there remains the same number of hours in a day as there always has been. It comes down to our prioritising the investment we are being asked to make into one another's lives. As we learnt last week, we really are intricately linked together, just like a body, and that means we really do need each other to be present (Ephesians 4:1-16).

The other meaning of present is to be 'present in His presence'. It's one thing to come to church out of religious duty (not something we would recommend), and it is a totally different thing to come hungry for His presence, ready to give ourselves in worship and receive what He desires to impart into our lives. We believe that when you are committed in covenant with God, He desires that we encounter His presence.

Hunger for God's presence, to experience Him at work in our lives, should be a daily dependency that grows as we continue to seek Him (Matthew 6:11). It's the humility

to come knowing we desperately need Him that gives us a motivation to pursue Him in ways we normally wouldn't.

Read Psalm 42 together.

Discuss together the language used. What is required to attain this same sense of desperation for God's presence?

Covenant Challenge

- + Which of the daily Covenant Challenges did you attempt this week? How did they go?
- + Which one could/will you keep doing?

Putting It Into Practice

One of the wonderful benefits of being in a Life Group is forming strong friendships that run deep as brothers and sisters in our faith. This means that there is a sense of accountability to one another forged in love and understanding. How could this idea of accountability be demonstrated by looking out for one another on a Sunday and not just at Life Group. You could arrange to catch up in the café after church and check in with one another? This could prompt a phone call to someone who wasn't at church to see how they are travelling. Start a chat group where you can encourage one another with a Bible verse that spoke to you through the week. Set a reminder in your phone for Saturday night that it's church on Sunday. Block out your calendar for church every Sunday.

Start that process now as a group and talk about how you could hold one another accountable to not only being at church but being 'present' at church.

Surrendered

Leader Notes

Before the Group Meeting

- + Contact the group members before the day of the meeting and remind them to review the sermon online, and keep up with the devotions
- + Read through this material
- + Pray for the group members and session
- + The 'Putting it Into Practice' section at the end of this session asks how you will commit to serving at Riverlife. Prayerfully consider if there's a project you can do together as a group this year.

Welcome and Catch Up

What was one thing that stood out from the previous week, either devotion, sermon or last week's study?

Thinking Things Through

Throughout our Covenant journey, we have looked at the relational activity and connection that comes from this kind of commitment. However, the Bible reminds us that, by ourselves and by our own effort, we are not able to be in a healthy relationship. Without God, our heart is full of brokenness, self-focus and selfish desires. But praise be to Jesus! God promised and then delivered on giving His children new hearts. The Scripture describes these hearts as no longer stone, but flesh: soft, not hard; humbly generous, not selfish; loving, not fearing. A truly

new heart, one that is God's 'new covenant' heart in a person, looks and acts just like Jesus' heart: loving, other's focussed, sacrificial, and humble.

It's quite clear in the Bible what our heart and actions should look like. However, what does that mean for us, when we aren't living in Bible-times, and we have a really big community and a really busy life? Well, the good (and bad) news, is that it can still look the same. Life still happens in relationship, we still have a choice of meeting our own needs or putting others first. The Christian life is centred around love, and for love to be authentic, it must put other's needs first. This requires sacrifice: sacrificing our own preferences, needs and desires, so that we can meet the other person's needs, wants and desires.

Read Philippians 2:1-13 together.

When Jesus said to take up our cross, He called us to die to our own selfish heart and live sacrificially focussed on others. He set the standard and modelled it Himself. We should work out the ramifications of our salvation "with fear and trembling", knowing that we are called to bless others. The beauty of God's economy is that when we serve others before us, and those others do the same, they serve us right back! As well as this, we find that we draw life from exchanges where we can freely give to others from what we have received from God.

Covenant Challenge

- + Which of the daily Covenant Challenges did you attempt this week? How did they go?
- + Which one could/will you keep doing?

Putting It Into Practice

My primary school motto was “As so many hands build a house, so many hearts make a school’. A little cheesy, but the sentiment is right: it takes physical and emotional effort, sacrifice and investment to build something of worth. You are most likely reading this in someone’s house, who has cleaned and prepared the space for you to be there. Someone prepared the study, the materials, the preaching series, and so on. People organise our church gatherings, get rostered on the coffee machine, show up to serve in Kids Church, and clean up the church after a service. Nothing happens magically without effort, yet everyone sacrificially contributing their effort out of love for each other makes a massive difference! We can get lots more done when lots more hearts and hands are contributing to the work of the Kingdom!

Spend some time asking the Lord where you can contribute to His kingdom work at Riverlife. Here’s how you can put that into practice:

- + Come to the ‘Join the Team’ Desk on Sunday. There will be all sorts of roles where you can start to contribute to the ministry of Riverlife.
- + Sign up for a ministry together as a Life Group. Serving together is fun, rewarding, and you see how God shapes you and blesses others.
- + If you’re already serving, great work! You can share a testimony of how you’ve seen God work.
- + Take up the challenge to keep serving in a ministry or at a service, but then make sure you attend a service to participate in our family here at Riverlife.

Radically Generous

Leader Notes

Before the Group Meeting

- + Contact the group members before the day of the meeting and remind them to review the sermon online, and keep up with the devotions
- + Read through this material
- + Pray for the group members and session
- + The 'Putting it Into Practice' section at the end of this session has the group reflecting on their financial giving. Spend some time beforehand thinking about your own generosity and reflect on any encouraging stories you may wish to share.

Welcome and Catch Up

What was one thing that stood out from the previous week, either devotion, sermon or last week's study?

Was there a particular Covenant Challenge from this last week where you have seen God already bless the church community?

Thinking Things Through

Jesus paid an incredibly high price for us to enjoy both the benefits as well as the responsibilities of being in covenant with Him. One thing we enjoy as a blessing of being in covenant with God is that He, by His very nature, is radically generous. The radical generosity of God shows itself in every part of His character, from the

time of creation through to His willingness to suffer on the cross. He is generous in love, compassion and mercy (Psalm 145:8), and pours His grace and provision upon His people. Jesus tells the story of the Lost Son (Luke 15:11–31) that clearly describes the extravagant and generous love of the Father. We are indeed blessed by being in covenant with our generous God, all we have and all we are, has been given to us by Him (Colossians 1:16).

If we serve a generous God, and He desires that we become more like Jesus, then it behoves us to be a generous people. In fact, Jesus went so far to say that God requires us to be a generous people towards Him (Luke 12:21). However, it doesn't stop there, God asks us to be generous towards others and that would be a measure of God's generosity towards us (Luke 6:38).

Learning to grow in generosity should be something we strive to do, but Jesus knew this wouldn't be easy. Jesus frequently told stories and taught about the lure of the material possessions and wealth of the world. He didn't say money or possessions were bad things, but He said that you can't serve God and money, you will end up either loving one and hating the other or be devoted to one and despise the other (Luke 6:24). Submitting our finances to God is an issue of lordship (all things under His control), and a matter of trust (God is faithful and will care for me). Learning to be a giving and generous people is a part of growing more Christlike, so that we might give with the right attitude (2 Corinthians 9:7–8).

Because we are in covenant with one another as a community (the church), our generosity should start in this context. If we believe that God's people together, empowered by the Holy Spirit, really do make a difference, then we should sow generously into the work

of the church. In the Old Testament they practiced what is called the 'tithe', the first 10 per cent of what we bring in (Genesis 14:19-21; 28:20-22; Malachi 3:8-10). In the New Testament we understand that everything is Gods and we are entrusted to manage what has been given for the benefit of the whole community. It seems good that even though we are not under the same instruction of tithing, this should be a great starting point for our generosity. In fact, learning to give 10 per cent to the church steadfastly lays the foundation for discovering the privilege of giving more than a tithe through offerings. Giving generously, with a great heart attitude and with no strings attached, fills us with a confident expectation of what God is going to do through us (2 Corinthians 9:6-15).

Covenant Challenge

- + Which of the daily Covenant Challenges did you attempt this week? How did they go?
- + Which one could/will you keep doing?

Putting It Into Practice

It was only a couple of hundred people who sacrificially gave for three years to allow us to make the move into the new church premises. Now that their pledges are finished, we still need to meet the debt of \$10M plus the ongoing ministry expenses of the church and its ministries and mission.

Imagine what we could do as a church if everyone that regularly came to Riverlife committed to giving their first 10 per cent! Take for example that if only one thousand people gave 10 per cent of an annual income of \$50,000. That's \$5M towards our budget. Can you imagine if everyone was committed to this?

Here's a few things you can do to commit to planned giving of your tithe and offerings. Which of these do you need to action?

- + The best and easiest way to give is to set up a direct debit from your account into the Riverlife church account (see the Riverlife News for account details). This is on your own banking system and under your control, however it really



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