The background of the image is a sunset over a beach. The sky is filled with soft, horizontal bands of color, transitioning from a pale purple at the top to a bright orange near the horizon. The ocean is visible in the middle ground, with gentle waves lapping at the shore. The foreground shows a sandy beach with some sparse, dark vegetation. The entire scene is framed by a thin white border.

THE POWER OF
COVENANT

Denis V Smith



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POWER OF COVENANT

Understanding the power of Cod's Covenant with Humanity

Dr. Denis V Smith



POWER OF COVENANT

Covenant is not really a word we use in our every day speech with each other. We do not normally go around saying to each other “How are things going with your covenant?” If we ever consider this word, we possibly do so in the context of legal use – as something to do with land or property.

The word is more at home in the solicitor’s office where the words, “caveat” and “contract,” might be used more often than the words we use in our vocabulary on a daily basis.

However, covenant is a word that is used much in the Bible. Because of our lack of use of the word in every day speech, we do not understand its power and impact.

It’s like using the words mortgage or easement. They don’t really become important until we buy a house or block of land.

So it is with the concept of covenant – we don’t really use it all that often.

This is sad, because God uses it so much in His Word. But, because we are not using the word in our daily speech, we usually pass over the impact of its usage in our daily lives. If we look up a thesaurus, we find words like “bond, oath, pledge, promise, oath, plight,” which are used.

If you have been married for a decade or so, you might have identified one of these in your marriage ceremony, "I plight thee my troth." That's Old English and I'm sure many of us wondered what we were actually doing when we "plighted out troths" on our Wedding day.

We possibly didn't take our investigations any further and our troth, which was plighted slowly faded away from our list of priority word-usage as we faced work, children, mortgages, caveats, sickness and the usual challenges of life.

If we are to understand its meaning from the Bible, we need to understand that the two key-words for covenant or alliance are:

In Hebrew the word is 'berit' or 'b'rit' Used in the Old Testament. It refers to the act or rite of the making of a covenant and also the standing contract between two partners.

In Greek the word is 'diatheke.'" This is the Greek translation of the Hebrew 'b'rit' which is used in the New Testament and is usually translated 'testament' in most cases.

Various other terms are used in the context of covenant. The most important are:

- 'Aheb' – to love
- 'Hesed' – covenant love or covenant solidarity
- 'Toba' – goodness or friendship
- 'Salom' – covenant peace or prosperity
- 'Yada' – to serve faithfully in accordance with the covenant

So, when we understand the word 'covenant' used in the Bible, we must remember that it has something to do with:

"A standing contract between two people based on love, goodness, friendship and peace where the two people live in a faithful relationship with each other as they serve one another."

In the Old Testament, covenants were made between mankind and God and between people and nations.

They were never made with things, although things could become part of a covenant. For example, land and property could become part of the covenant agreement.

Let's take a quick walk through the Bible and see some of the main covenants that were established between God and mankind.



ADAM & EVE

In Genesis 1-3 we have the record of the creation of the world with particular focus on the Garden of Eden.

In Genesis 2, God instructed Adam concerning God's side of the agreement for him to stay in the garden. He could stay there as long as he stayed away from a certain tree.

"And the LORD God commanded the man saying, 'Of every tree of the garden you may freely eat: But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, you shall not eat of it: for in the day you eat thereof you shall surely die.'" [Genesis 2:16-17]

Remember, ladies, God told Adam that rule before He created Eve, so don't let the men put the heavy burden on women because Eve ate the fruit.

It was Adam's responsibility – *he* heard the covenant before Eve was created from his side!

It was simple – there was a covenant – one simple rule – stay away and stay in! They didn't know the downside of the agreement – Eat the fruit and you're out! They did and they were!

History that followed informs us that God would now be at a distance, but there was a way to keep in touch with Him.

The way now was by sacrifice! Something must die to bring a holy God and sinful humanity into a close relationship.

Time goes by and the sin in mankind's life spreads like a cancer – everyone is infected – and men and women walk away from the simple covenant.

God has had enough of mankind's disobedience and plans to destroy sinful humanity in a flood.



NOAH

God sees a righteous man and instructs him to build an ark of safety. All may enter, but only eight do! The animals have more sense than sinful man – they enter and the door of opportunity is closed.

The flood comes and waters cover the face of the earth.

When the judgment has passed and the ark rests safely on Mount Ararat, the door is opened and an altar is built. In Genesis 9 the story is told.

“And God blessed Noah and his sons, and said to them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and fill the earth. And God spoke to Noah and to his sons with him saying, And behold, I establish my covenant with you, and with your descendants after you; And I will establish my covenant with you; neither shall all flesh be cut off any more by the waters of a flood; neither shall there any more be a flood to destroy the earth. And God said, This is the token of the covenant which I make between me and you and every living creature that is with you, for perpetual generations; I do set my bow in the cloud, and it shall be for a token of a covenant between me and the earth.

14And it shall come to pass, when I bring a cloud over the earth, that the bow shall be seen in the cloud: And I will remember my covenant, which is between me and you and every living creature of all flesh; and the waters shall no more become a flood to destroy all flesh. And the bow shall be in the cloud; and I will look upon it, that I may remember the everlasting covenant between God and every living creature of all flesh that is upon the earth. And God said to Noah, This is the token of the covenant, which I have established between me and all flesh that is upon the earth.” [Genesis 9:1-17]

And that’s why each time there is a storm – look up and see the rainbow – it is the token of covenant – God has made a covenant with you.

You know that you will never die in a universal flood – God has given you the sign and He is faithful to His agreement!

With that foundation, we quickly pass through a series of individual and national covenants that God made.

ABRAHAM

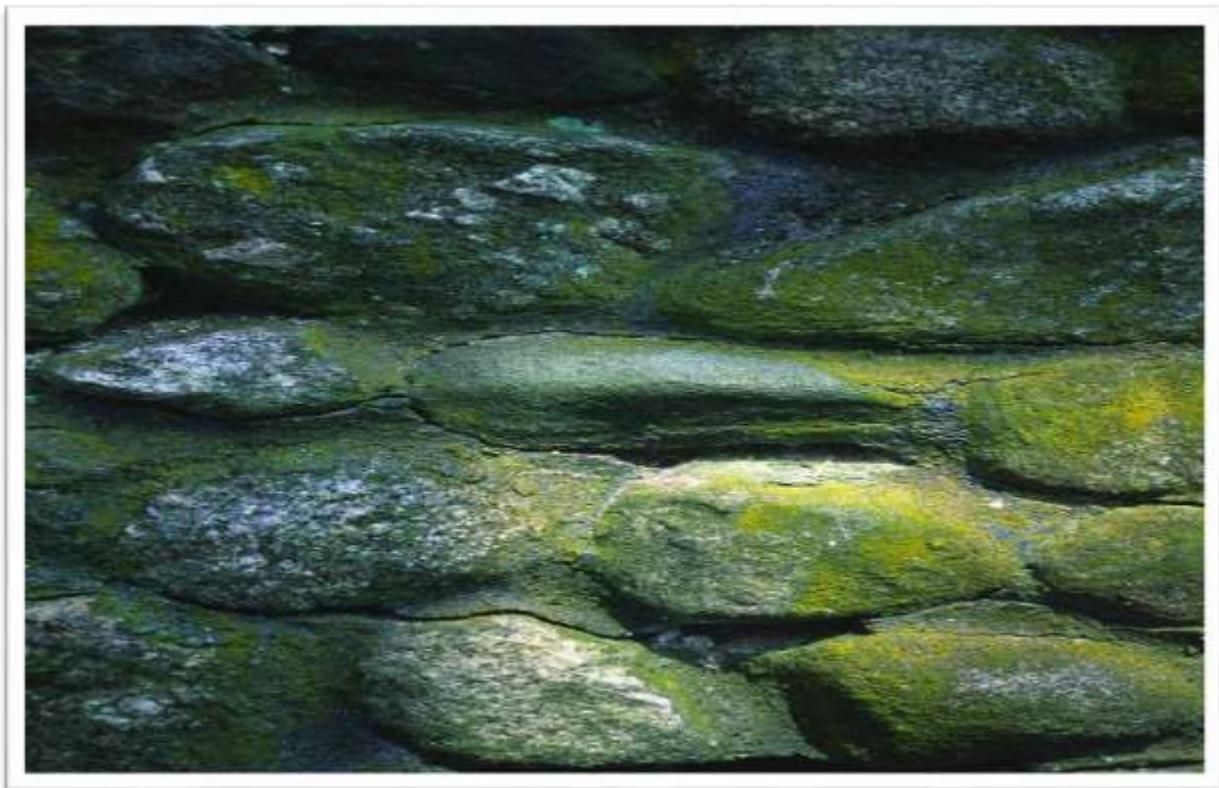
As the years passed, God’s plans continued to unfold. He called a family from ancient Babylon and promised Abraham that he would see a great nation come from his descendants. The story commenced in Genesis 12.

“Now the LORD had said to Abram, Get out of your country and from your kindred, and from your father’s house, to a land that I will show you. And I will make of you a great nation, and will bless you, and make your name great, and you shall be a blessing: And I will bless them that bless you, and will curse him who curses you: and in you shall all families of the earth be blessed.” [Genesis 12: 1-3]

The historical record now stands for itself – God kept His side of the covenant.

Abraham and Sarah had a miraculous answer to their impossible situation and the following generations resulted in the nation of Israel through which came Messiah.

And each time the covenant was renewed with Abraham’s son and grandson – Isaac and Jacob – or God was worshiped in response to that covenant, – an altar was built and sacrifices made.



Years pass and the descendants of Abraham are now in Egypt – slaves, wincing under the whips of their task masters.

MOSES

The record opens in Exodus 1 and 2. You can almost hear the crack of the whips, the sloshing feet of the Israelites in the mud pits, the curses and commands of the soldiers, the cries of the children and the groaning of the people as you read. In chapter 2 we find the record...

“And God heard their groaning, and God remembered His covenant with Abraham, with Isaac, and with Jacob; And God looked upon the children of Israel and God had respect unto them.” [Exodus 2:23-24]

One Israelite is unknowingly trained for 40 years to ascend the throne of Egypt, but God had other ideas. A further 40 years in the wilderness when this man Moses, sees a burning bush as he ascends the mountain of God in the wilderness – then back to Egypt with the command, “let my people go!”



Plagues and miracles – the Passover and the exodus – the Red Sea opens and the horses and chariots of Pharaoh are no more! God did remember His covenant – not that He had ever forgotten it – it was just not the time for fulfilment!

To Mount Sinai – Moses again ascends the mountain and Israel rise up to play! The record is in Exodus 19.

“And Moses went up unto God, and the LORD called unto him out of the mountain saying, Thus shall you say to the house of Jacob, and tell the children of Israel; 4You have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagle’s wings, and brought you unto myself. Now therefore, if you will obey my voice indeed, and keep my covenant, then you shall be a peculiar treasure unto me above all people: for all the earth is mine: And you shall be unto me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.” [Exodus 19:3-6]



Ten Commandments in stone are presented, but each is broken before they have the chance to be read.

However, God is faithful to His covenant and gives opportunity for the nation to become the peculiar treasure above all people.

Laws and regulations are given, offerings, feasts and festivals are established, tribes and clans are formed.

The nation marches toward its promised land with the priests bearing the Tabernacle of worship on their shoulders and carrying the brazen and golden altars which are part of the nation's worship.

They fail to enter – they break their side of the agreement through lack of faith and commitment to the God who promised to lead them in. Forty years later, when the unbelieving generation has died out, Moses reminds them of the covenant in his last sermon – the book of Deuteronomy.



Joshua leads the nation in – they conquer and divide the land – the Tabernacle is erected and the covenant works!

They settle in peace – but soon forget God!

Cycles of trouble are ended by God raising up deliverers – Judges who will lead the people back to the Covenant.

The last Judge, Samuel gives them a king – against his better judgment – and now Saul rules the nation.

DAVID

Saul soon forgets the covenant instructions God gives him and after 40 years is replaced by a shepherd. David rules and God re-affirms the covenant with him.

The story is recorded in 2 Samuel 7. It is not a new covenant, but an extension of the covenant of Moses.

David dies after ruling 40 years and Solomon ascends the throne of Israel. Peace characterised his rule – the great Temple is built and the glory of God is manifested within its walls on the day it is dedicated.

Thousands of offerings are made and the incense from the altars ascends to the throne of God. He is pleased.



Then the nation breaks apart in civil war following Solomon's death and history records the downward trend of each of the groups – Israel and Judah.

God sends His prophets and one of them lifts the curtain to allow the people to look into the future.



Isaiah's prophetic voice thunders in the ears of the nation. In Isaiah 1:

"To what purpose is the multitude of your sacrifices unto me, saith the LORD: I am full of the burnt offerings or rams and the fat of fed beasts; and I delight not in the blood of bullocks or of lambs, or of he goats. Bring no more vain oblations; incense is an abomination unto me; the new moons and Sabbaths, the calling of assemblies I cannot bear; it is iniquity, even the solemn meeting. Your new moons and your appointed feasts my soul hates: they are a trouble unto me; I am weary to bear them. And when you spread forth your hands, I will hide my eyes from you: yea, when you make your many prayers, I will not hear: your hands are full of blood." [Isaiah 1:11-15]

But, continuing with the same passion, he reminds them that God still wants the covenant to remain in effect:

"Come now and let us reason together, says the LORD; though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool. If you become willing and obedient, you shall eat the good of the land." [Isaiah 1:18-19]

As he continues to prophesy, he speaks of **“a virgin bringing forth a Son, His name will be called Immanuel; He will suffer and die but see the travail of his soul and be satisfied!”**

Isaiah speaks of a coming day of restoration – a new heaven and earth – but for the most part, his message falls on deaf ears!



Another prophet takes up the theme of covenant.

JEREMIAH

The weeping prophet walks through the land – weeping over the nation’s sinfulness and their breaking of the agreement between Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, David and Almighty God!

However, he too, like Isaiah, lifts the curtain concerning the future and turns on a spotlight as he says in Jeremiah 31:

“Behold the days come, saith the LORD, that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah: Not according to the covenant I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt; which my covenant they broke, although I was a husband unto them, saith the LORD: But this shall be the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel; After those days, saith the LORD, I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be my people. And they shall teach no more every man his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying, Know the LORD: for they shall all know me, from the least of them unto the greatest of them saith the LORD: for I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more.” [Jeremiah 31:31-34]



And they didn't understand what he meant.

As the curtains closed on the Old Testament, the voice of the last prophet Malachi is heard in the land reminding them that God has loved them and would send His servant to them in preparation of His coming.

Four hundred years pass and the promised one comes – John the Baptist proclaims he is nothing more than a voice in the wilderness preparing the people for One who is greater than he!

Crowds flock to hear his message – they await the Greater One! So it came to pass – the Son of the virgin – Immanuel – Jesus Christ offered the kingdom to Israel – offered it in demonstration and power – deeds and words – but as John records in John 1:11, **“He came to His own, and his own received him not.”**



The kingdom was offered and rejected!

As Matthew 22:43 records, Jesus said, **“Therefore, I say unto you, the kingdom of God shall be taken from you, and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof.”**

And that’s exactly what happened. The nation rejected their King and the covenant He brought, and crucified Him.

It was not just Israel as a nation, for behind the scenes Satan and his fallen angels motivated the plot. If they really knew what was going to happen, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory.

However, just prior to the events of Calvary, Jesus took aside the twelve apostles and with them instituted that new covenant which would be written in their hearts and brought to remembrance by the sharing of the bread and wine of communion. Matthew 26 has the record:

“And as they were eating, Jesus took bread, and blessed it, and brake it, and gave it to the disciples, and said, Take, eat; this is my body. And He took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, Drink ye all of it; For this is my blood of the new covenant [testament] which is shed for many for the remission of sins. But I say unto you, I will not drink thereof of this fruit of the vine, until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father’s kingdom.”
[Matthew 26:26-29]

And that’s where we are today! In a new covenant relationship with Almighty God through Jesus Christ! As you read the book of Hebrews, you find this truth, time and time again. Over and over, the truth comes to us that we have become part of a covenant which is better than the Old Covenant.



A New Covenant based on better promises with a better priesthood which provides life and not death.

Just as a photograph of a person does not provide the true reality of that person, so the Old Covenant was only a picture of what was to come. Each picture under the Old Covenant was pointing to a greater reality which was to come.

OLD COVENANT – BY MOSES

- Gifts and sacrifices were brought by the guilty
- A shadow
- Limited Promises
- People failed the Agreement
- External standards and rules
- Limited Access to God
- Based on fear
- Provided Legal cleansing
- Continual sacrifice necessary
- Rules that must be obeyed
- Forgiveness must be earned
- Sacrifices were yearly
- Human effort was required
- Its blessings available only to some

NEW COVENANT – BY JESUS CHRIST

- The Sinless Christ offered Himself when He was not guilty
- A reality
- Limitless Promises

- Christ would never fail the Agreement
- Internal standards – a new heart
- Unlimited Access to God
- Based on love
- Provided personal cleansing
- Conclusive Sacrifice
- Serve the Living God
- Forgiveness freely given
- Sacrifice was complete in Christ
- God's grace was sufficient
- Its blessings provided to all

APPLICATION OF COVENANT IN OUR LIVES

- Christ died for us!
- God is directly involved in your life!
- Eternal reality!
- Trusted Promises!
- Christ keeps the agreement!
- Accountable to God – not rules!
- God is personally available!
- There is hope!
- Complete Cleansing is available!
- Christ's sacrifice perfect and final!
- A relationship, not regulations!

- True and complete forgiveness!
- Perfect and final sacrifice!
- Initiated by God's love!
- Covenant blessings available to each of us!

So we come to the *power* of covenant.

What does that really mean to you in your everyday life?

Let me share with you what it means to me.

Let me describe "covenant" again.

"A standing contract between two people based on love, goodness, friendship and peace where the two people live in a faithful relationship with each other as they serve one another."

Then how do I apply this in my understanding of the New Covenant?

GOD'S COVENANT TO ME IS PERSONAL!

Almighty God is no longer 'out there' – He is close to me and through His Son Jesus Christ I can come to Him. No longer do I need to fear as the men and women of Israel of old who could not come near the blazing mountain of God lest they be thrust through with a dart and die.

By the virtue of Jesus Christ, I can draw near to God and call He whom authors called Jehovah, Lord, Almighty and Everlasting God – *my* father.

I become concerned when people tell me he does not have a good relationship with God because he had a bad relationship with their father. I find it difficult to comprehend that your view of your earthly father is the picture you look at the understand God.

My friend, don't look to the earth for your pattern – look to heaven and heaven's words – the Bible – that is the pattern. As I read the Bible, I seek to pattern my life and appreciation of the Fatherhood of God on what He has declared Himself to be – not on any earthly image of a father.

I don't want to look at earthly photos, I want to see the real person – and I see Him in His Word – and I pattern myself on Him rather than on any demonstration of earthly fatherhood I may see.

There is a truth to be stated though.

We on earth should demonstrate to those around us something of what we have come to understand personally of God and His love.

I understand that Selwyn Hughes's wife, before she died said words to this effect, "Selwyn, thank you for demonstrating Christ's love to me as you loved me as your wife!"

God's covenant to me is personal – and God has declared that through His Son, He will never leave me or forsake me so that I might boldly say, The Lord is my helper, I will not be afraid; what can man do to me?"

GOD'S COVENANT TO ME IS POWERFUL!

When I understand the resources behind the new covenant I am encouraged to believe that what God did for mankind before I was born, He will continue to do for me during my life-time.

When it rains, I look to the clouds and remind myself of God's covenant with me – the rainbow is His token to me – I know there will never be another flood.

I know we don't always like rain – but without it, you'll never see His covenant bow in the skies.

And the God who brought Abraham from Babylon and made a great nation of him?

Each time I see a Jew and keep my eye on the nation of Israel, I see the power of God to fulfil His word – to keep His side of the covenant!



If He who keeps Israel shall neither slumber nor sleep, I know He will keep His eye upon me! The resources of eternity are behind His covenant.

When my father died, his will declared that all he had was given – not to me – but to others. He did not even include a small amount of money for an air fare, so I could bury him. Thus, my resources from my earthly father were nothing.

But, what I receive from my Heavenly Father as part of His covenant is amazing.

Christ died to make God's Last Will and Testament effective. A will has no effect as long as a person lives. It cannot be executed.

I have been an executor to a particular person's will. But I could not implement any portion of that will unless he died. He would have been in big trouble if I died first!

But Christ died to make the New Covenant [testament] come into effect – He rose again to become the Executor of His own will and covenant! Hallelujah!



Not only did He state the blessings that would come to us in His New Covenant – but He is alive and well to ensure we receive that which He has promised – and all the promises of God are mine in Christ Jesus my Lord!

GOD'S COVENANT TO ME IS ETERNAL!

Covenants, agreements, wills and testaments are only for time. I have a covenant agreement which is not only for time – but for eternity!

He has promised that I will live forever! Death to me is passing from life to eternal life – from time to the throne – from earth to heaven.

He has promised to keep that which I have committed to Him until that day. God's covenant to me is that I will see my loved ones who have gone on before!

I have a brother and sister I have never seen – I will see them again!

I have attended enough funerals and buried enough of my friends and poured a handful of dust on their graves – but I know that I will see them again! There is coming a day when the last enemy – death – will be conquered forever.

And beyond my days of reunion – I will look upon the face of my Saviour – I will see Him, whom I have loved for decades, and I will rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory! By faith, I do it in time - but then face to face – forever with the Lord.

I don't know if your eternal life excites you – but it does me! His covenant is eternal!

MY RELATIONSHIPS WITHIN THE CHURCH REFLECT COVENANT!

How do I work this out on earth?

I am going to spend eternity with you – God's power and love allow me the privilege to live with you now in the same relationship. I find it difficult to understand people who say they cannot forgive a brother or a sister for some hurt.

In God's name – let it go!

You will be *forever* with each other – the scars of torn relationships in time will need to be sorted out in eternity. Do it now!

I am in covenant with you.

We are bound together by the cords of God's love – Jesus said, "a new commandment I give unto you that you love one another as I have loved you." We are bound together by the Great Commission "to go into all the world and preach this gospel to every creature!"

By the power of the Holy Spirit, we are one body!

MY MARRIAGE IS A REFLECTION OF COVENANT!

In Malachi 2:14 God speaks of your partner as the partner of your covenant.

My marriage is a covenant relationship. Because I am part of God's New Covenant, I choose to live in covenant with my wife. And as God keeps His side of covenant with me, so I keep covenant with my wife. I will not break covenant!

Husbands love your wives as Christ loved the church and gave Himself for it!

Wives love your husbands. This is covenant love – there is no fine print in your marriage vow – no escape clauses – no use by date!

I challenge you who are married to renew your covenant as you remind yourself of possibly the only vow you have ever made in this life!

I encourage you who are not married to live covenant-lives until God in His sovereignty brings you the partner of His choice and yours.

I bless those who have been called to sovereign singleness. Live in covenant relationship to please Him who has called you to please Him and honour Him in your singleness. Great will be your reward!

I exhort the widows and widowers to remain faithful until the day comes when all tears will be wiped away and your joy will be full!

THE DEDICATION OF MY FAMILY IS A REFLECTION OF COVENANT!

When I presented my children in dedication to the Lord, I was reminding myself and my God that this is covenant commitment!

As an act of pure faith I lifted my children towards Almighty God and returned that which was 'the heritage of the Lord' to the Throne for His sovereign keeping.

And day by day I pray for my children that they will understand and live by that covenant that is not written down with pen and ink but inscribed with the blood of an everlasting covenant on the flesh of their hearts and mine.

And you, whose children are facing the challenge of finding their identity – do not let go – hold on – remember covenant!

Children are the heritage of the Lord! Suffer the children – for of such is the kingdom of God!

What I see expressed in Covenant on Earth is a foretaste of what I will see in Heaven!

I was asked the question, "What will my relationship to my wife be in heaven?" This question has been raised so often. It is difficult to answer. A Christian man or woman may have been married properly and correctly more than once in life.

My reply was this.

I know that whatever the beauty of a relationship on earth – it will be totally eclipsed and bettered by a heavenly relationship. We know there will be no physical relationship in heaven – we will be as the angels – but God has reserved something better for us.

Therefore, the best I can enjoy on earth will be far better in heaven!

But, in conclusion, let me say this.

You may respond by saying, “I could never do it – I could not keep covenant like you have shared today!”

I heard a story concerning a little boy who left his favourite toy truck outside one night. A storm came and blew a tree on top of it. The next morning, the boy went out to find his truck and saw it was pinned by the branches of the tree. He tried unsuccessfully to get it out and came crying to his father, “I cannot do it,” he said, “Try harder,” replied his father. He went out again and pulled and tugged on the branches and the truck but failed. Three more times he came in and received the same advice.

Finally, he returned and said, “It’s impossible, I’ve tried as hard as I can. I can’t do any more. There’s nothing more I can do” “No,” replied the father, “there is still one more thing to do – **ask me for my help!**”

Let’s do that with our Heavenly Father!

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