



ARTICLES

Handling Transitions

By Pastor Kevin Van Wyk

Many are starting school.

Some are starting new jobs.

Some have moved.

Some are facing significant health issues.

Some are grieving the loss of a loved one.

Our home has watched our eldest child get married and move out, our middle child return to college, and our two foster girls move to a new home. (Thank you to our youngest for not adding to the change.)

We are excited for each of these transitions. Obviously, we are thrilled to add Susanna to our family, we celebrate the opportunities and experiences Zack is getting in Nashville, and we are so grateful to see the girls have the potential for permanency with Mitch and Jessa and still have continued contact with us. What blessings!

Yet, those little boys that would rock out to Skillet leave an empty silence. Those little girls that would giggle and laugh uncontrollably leave an empty silence, too. It's early in the transition, so we've barely experienced it,

but it leaves us wondering, what happens when the last one goes? What else will happen in life? How do you fill the gap?

As I ponder these questions, I can't help but ache for those who are facing the loss of a spouse or parent. The grief and pain does not compare.

Others of you are watching your youngest head to school and leaving the home empty all day. Some of you have been wrestling for years with the transition to being alone.

We all face transitions and changes in life. **How should we handle it?**

I love doing research on these questions, so I did a quick DuckDuckGo search (see why it's not Google in last month's article). The results were disappointing and sad from my perspective. Their solutions included...

- Acknowledge you feel sad, fearful, or vulnerable.
- Know your feelings will change. (Ah, maybe for the worse.)
- Trust your ability to make decisions.
- Distract yourself with anything.
- Make the moment you are in the most important thing in your mind.
- Quiet your mind and be grateful.

The suggestions go on and on with self-help babble that makes it sound like it's all on you to move forward. Even some Christian blogs give you a list of "to-dos" with a dose of Christian guilt... be more grateful, breathe, meditate more, pray more... i.e. it's up to your actions.

Meanwhile God simply tells us...

"Be still, and know that I am God... Psalm 46:10 (NIV)

My interpretation goes like this "STOP! No, really. STOP all your activity. STOP running around. STOP distracting yourself with endless posts, redundant news, and evil entertainment. Simply reflect on Me, the Almighty Creator and Sustainer of life. Ponder my power and providence!"

I am soon taking vacation with no plans to go anywhere. (FYI when you read

this the vacation will be nearly over.) I have several things I'd like to take care of at home, but my hope is to be still and know that He is God. As the busy fall comes upon us, will you stop and consider your God.

PRAY: Lord, help me stop busying my life with endless tasks and to-do lists. Help me say no. Help me rest in You. May You be exalted in me above all else. AMEN.

What is a Covenant?

By Tim Fennell

And I will make an everlasting covenant with them: I will never stop doing good for them. I will put a desire in their hearts to worship me, and they will never leave me. - Jeremiah 32:40 (NLT)

Pastor Kevin preached a two-part sermon series highlighting the pillars of the Church that hold us together using the aptly named series "Glue" to illustrate from Solomon's prayer what theology holds Israel together as the Nation of God. That can then be applied to the greater Church today. So, this got me thinking about words that are common in Church rhetoric and the scriptures but might not be as understood today as it was by the Church fathers. Covenant is one such word.

At Alto, we use the terms "covenant partner" and "covenant leader," which are meant to suggest a deeper connection than just a being member. We have the word "covenant" in the Old and New Testaments. Reformed Theology is nicknamed "covenant theology" as opposed to dispensationalism.^[1] This is because Reformed Theology, in the simplest terms, explains that God interacts with his people in the form of covenants, which are imbued with His grace and offering of salvation. There are three categories of covenants and five specific Covenants God enacts with his people. These covenants are the backbone of God's rescue plan for humanity and show us that God has always loved us, even when sin entered this world, corrupting His design for us. The covenant types are redemption, works, and grace. The specific covenants we have all heard but might not have realized are Noahic, Abrahamic, Mosaic, Davidic, and Everlasting (also called the New Covenant). I will go into the specifics of these covenants in a separate article because each one is unique and warrants its

own explanation.

Covenant as a legal document

Many who have grown up in the Church, have heard this word be likened to a contract or an oath. However, it is much more than just placing a signature on a legal document. Old Blues songs suggest a better metaphor for a covenant with the myth of meeting the Devil at the Crossroads and signing a contract in blood, forsaking your soul for fame, wealth, etc. All the elements of a real covenant are in this crude modern myth. However, historically a covenant is the oldest form of a political legal treaty or oath. The Israelites weren't the only nation to use this. Historians have found covenants that predate the Abrahamic covenant, which is the most detailed in Scripture. There were two types. One was a parity treaty where both parties had the same amount of political/military power coming together for military might against a common enemy. The more common type was the suzerain/vassal treaty. Here, the more powerful party would demand submission from the other when entering the treaty. Thus, making them a vassal. Much of the ancient rhetoric suggests a "father and son" or "lord and servant" relationship. In this sort of agreement, the lord would have control over the vassal's people and land, all the while, allowing the vassal to still rule over their land for the most part. Many times the suzerain or lord would give land to the vassal as a way to show "hesed" or loyalty. Hesed is very important for understanding God's covenants with man. This Hebrew word embodies a loyalty full of love, lovingkindness, mercy, and faithfulness. This is the basis for all of God's covenants. This type of loyalty only comes from relationships and the willingness of sacrifice, normally expressed through the father and son bond.[\[2\]](#)

The metaphorical becomes the physical

The purpose of a covenant is to be contractual but carries more weight and value due to the required amount of loyalty between the parties. But as suggested in the myth of the Devil and the Crossroads, all covenants require blood and sacrifice. This is expressed in the physical creation of a covenant, as well as, the language used in the legal document.

Sidenote: I keep bringing up the myth of the Crossroads to show that the Enemy can never create anything original but only corrupt God's design, and as

believers, we can deduce the contrast between the covenants. There is a sacrifice to create a covenant and a sacrifice if the covenant is broken. To create a covenant, the parties must “cut a bĕrît.” This is the act of cutting and sacrificing an animal for this oath. We get the full details of Abraham’s contract with God in Genesis 15. Which is wild when we think about what God is doing relationally.

The cutting of a covenant or bĕrît resulted in obligations placed on both parties. These oaths were ratified using mutually appropriate animals for sacrifice. This sacrifice served to communicate the consequences of covenant-breaking. The eighth-century- B.C. treaty between Ashur-nirari V of Assyria and Mati’ilu of Arpad serves as a gruesome but well-stated emphasis placed on the reasons to prevent covenant-breaking.

This head is not the head of a spring lamb, it is the head of Mati’-ilu, it is the head of his sons, his magnates and the people of his land. If Mati’-ilu [should sin] against this treaty, so may, just as the head of this spring lamb is cut off, and its knuckle placed in its mouth, [...] the head of Mati’-ilu be cut off... This shoulder is not the shoulder of a spring lamb, it is the shoulder of Mati’-ilu, it is the shoulder of his sons, his magnates, and the people of his land...[\[3\]](#)

The consequences of breaking a covenant always end in death and destruction. Depending on the conditions, one person or a nation was affected and faced the consequences of not upholding their end of the contract. We don’t have any example today that compares to how important this legally binding document was to ancient peoples. We make contracts, promises, and oaths daily in a flippant manner comparatively. This is one of the reasons Jesus preaches on oaths in the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew. Even in his day, people did not fully understand the weight of their promises and oaths.

What does this tell us about God?

Our modern society is full of broken promises, flakey attitudes, high divorce rates, absent parents, etc. Oaths, contracts, and promises don’t seem to matter to people outside of those situations due to a lack of consequences for our actions in today’s society. Whether it’s breaking a covenant or an oath, we don’t have death associated with the consequences. However, it affects our hearts

deeply. All of us have this brokenness in us. Sin is the religious word for it, but throughout our lives, we can feel the pain that sin has caused us and others. All of this is due to our sinful nature. So many times, it seems that we cannot get out of the vicious cycle. The world always tries to fix things without God. The New Age manifesting trend is just one of the ways the world cons us into thinking we can do this ourselves. We can think of good things to happen, and those good things will come through. Realistically, we all know that it is good to be positive, but the world doesn't revolve around us and the good things we want. This paradigm is a logical fallacy. Bad things happen to good people, and good things happen to bad people. Sin is the problem. What does this have to do with understanding covenants?

God enacted various covenants with man so that He could progress in His rescue plan for humanity. The simple act of offering a covenant reveals a glimpse of God's character. As stated, a covenant was a political-legal oath. This oath system was created by humans for humans. Not by God. Yet God uses the human system to develop a relationship with humans. In Genesis 15, Abram is distraught about not having an heir. Having children meant survival. Due to his faithfulness in God, God offers him to cut a bĕrît. God is offering! Abram is worried and doubtful about what God can do for him, yet God chooses to use this human system to build more trust with Abram. God desires to quell Abram's fears.

He said to him, 'Bring me a heifer three years old, a female goat three years old, a ram three years old, a turtle-dove, and a young pigeon.'
He brought him all these and cut them in two, laying each half over against the other; but he did not cut the birds in two. And when birds of prey came down on the carcasses, Abram drove them away.
As the sun was going down, a deep sleep fell upon Abram, and a deep and terrifying darkness descended upon him. Then the Lord said to Abram, 'Know this for certain, that your offspring shall be aliens in a land that is not theirs, and shall be slaves there, and they shall be oppressed for four hundred years; but I will bring judgement on the nation that they serve, and afterwards they shall come out with great possessions. As for yourself, you shall go to your ancestors in peace; you shall be buried in a good old age. And they shall come back here in the fourth generation; for the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet complete.'
When the sun had gone down and it was dark, a smoking fire-pot and

a flaming torch passed between these pieces. On that day the Lord made a covenant with Abram, saying, 'To your descendants I give this land, from the river of Egypt to the great river, the river Euphrates[4]

The sacrifices were made, and the animals split down the middle. Essentially, a path is made between the animals for both parties to walk down. Both parties would be covered in blood by this ceremonial act. However, God had Abram fall into a deep sleep. Then, only God walks the path. God is the suzerain in this covenant, yet he takes on all the responsibility for the consequences of this covenant. God has all the power yet takes all the responsibility. Nothing is required of Abram besides the faithfulness he has already shown. God puts all of Abram's fears at ease and even extends the blessing to his descendants. God knows we can never uphold our end of the oath, so he takes it completely upon himself. What amazing grace and love God has for us, his creation! This love and grace is embodied in all of the covenants God makes with his people, concluding with the everlasting covenant, which is Christ's sacrifice on the cross. Our faith in Christ is the only way out of the vicious cycle of sin.

So, when we talk about the covenants God has made with man, I hope we can grasp the depth of God's love for us. And as we enter into being "covenant partners" at Alto, it's my prayer that God continues to grow that wonder and awe of His love, and we reflect that love to others in and outside the Church. We are a covenant people. Being a covenant people becomes a mindset that we need to have as we enter a world that is increasingly opposed to God. As God reveals more of himself to us through our lives, let us bring glory to Him in all that we do. This is done by keeping our focus on Christ and loving others as He has taught us to love.

[1] Sproul, R.C., What is Reformed Theology? (Baker Publishing: Grand Rapids, 1997), 117-134. [2] Richter, Sandra L., The Epic of Eden, (InterVarsity Press: Dowers Grove, 2008), 74-75 [3] Arnold and Beyer, Readings from the Ancient Near East, p.101; ANET, pp. 532-33. [4] Genesis 15:9-18 New Revised Standard Edition

Equipping Youth Update

By Randy McDaniel

The summer has come to an end. There was a lot of good time spent with the youth, and there will be far more, greater times to come. We finished the book of Amos and got to see how if the people of Israel and Judah would simply repent from oppressing the poor and needy and giving Him mere lip service, God would relent His pending judgement against them. God said this judgement would be the Assyrian and Babylonians coming in to annihilate most of them, and take the remaining into captivity. They did not repent, and we know from antiquity the prophesy was fulfilled.

We learned how this was of no surprise to Israel and Judah, or at least shouldn't have been. How several times through Amos, and Hosea, God told them over and over through the prophets, sent natural disasters, sent famines, and sent diseases to wake them up and get them to come back to him. They did not listen. Yet, in the same breath, God promised salvation. He said the captive remnant would return to Israel, that they would be abundantly prosperous, that their fortunes would be resorted, that their ruins would be rebuilt, and that they would never again be uprooted (Amos 9:11-15).

This is the mighty right hand of God. He judges sin and offers salvation because He is both just and the justifier (Roman 3:26), and we Gentiles are grafted into their promises through Jesus (Romans 11) making a unified, singular body of Jews and Gentiles together (Ephesian 2:14-22).

This school year we will be studying the parables of Jesus in the book of Matthew. The "Kingdom Keys" to heaven. I can't help but think how much alike America is to the 5th century BC Israelites. How God over and over in His bible has told us the pending disaster, the "great tribulation", that is to come due to the grievous sins of the world. How if we will simply humble ourselves, confess Jesus as Lord and believe with all our heart that God raised Him from the dead, we would be saved and spared the terrible wrath of God.

So, I'm excited to dive in with the teens the reward of their salvation, heaven, and how our Lord says it really is. How the purpose of the Christian life is God preparing us for heaven. How heaven is paradise because that is where Christ is. How Christ has glory far greater than any of us can imagine prepared and waiting for us in the Father's perfect timing.

Please continue to pray for the youth. Pray that they grow in saving faith in

Jesus. Pray that we can reach many youths who are lost and don't know the love of the Father.

Equipping Children & Families Update

By Lynnae Loomans

Thanks to everyone who participated in the Run 4 the Fair and to the church for sponsoring it.

Now it's time to get back into the routines and schedules of school, sports, and church activities.

- Bible class begins Wednesday, Sept 4th from 6:45-7:30pm.
- Sunday School begins Sunday, Sept 8th at 10:45-11:30am.

I'm so excited to see everyone and start the year off. Thanks to all my volunteers this year who are taking the time out of their busy lives to help these children grow closer to Christ.

MESSAGES

Thank you for all the cards & gifts received for my birthday. So very appreciated!

-Dayton Ter Beest

Thank you very much for your \$1,295 donation. We truly appreciate the generosity of people like you. Your helps enables us to assist those in our community who are struggling.

-Waupun Area Food Pantry

EVENTS

September Events

- September 4
Wednesday
Bible Class Kickoff
1st-8th graders are invited to Bible Class Wednesdays at 6:45-7:30pm.
- September 8
Sunday
Sunday School & Middle School Youth Group Kickoff
Everyone 3 years old and up is invited to Sunday School at 10:45-11:30am.
All 6th-8th graders are invited to Middle School Youth Group at 6:30-8pm.
- September 8
Sunday
Outdoor Trap Shooting
Adults or parents with teenagers are invited to an informal trap shoot. Shooting supplies and targets will be made available. Please text Ned Derksen if you are interested in attending and further details will be sent.
- September 11
Wednesday
High School Youth Group Kickoff
All 9-12th graders are invited to High School Youth Group at 7:30-9pm.
- September 15
Wednesday
Covenant Partnership Class
Ready to up your commitment to Christ and His church? Church membership, or as we call it covenant partnership, is a commitment every believer should take as it provides support for you and opens doors for you to grow and serve. Join Pastor Kevin to learn more on at 11:30am. Lunch is provided. Family is welcome to come. Contact him with questions and to let him know you are coming.
- September 21
Saturday
Road Rally
Fill up your gas tanks and dust off your flashlights, it's Road Rally time! Join us at 7pm for a time of fellowship, clue solving, food, and lots of fun! Sign your team of 4 up at the Information Center and we will see you there! See Nate and Jenna Bille or Cody and Katie Mueller with any questions.

NEWS

Alliance Update:

"The Church's faithful witness to Jesus is the hope of the world."

Greetings once again to the faithful servants in the Alliance of Reformed Churches. We write to follow-up and provide more details of our in-person Board meeting from August 8-10 and are once again reminded of Paul's words, this time in Colossians 1: 2-6:

2 Grace and peace to you from God our Father. 3 We always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when we pray for you, 4 because we have heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love you have for all God's people— 5 the faith and love that spring from the hope stored up for you in heaven and about which you have already heard in the true message of the gospel 6 that has come to you. In the same way, the gospel is bearing fruit and growing throughout the whole world—just as it has been doing among you since the day you heard it and truly understood God's grace.

Below is a summary of important decisions made by the Alliance Board during our time together:

A. Policy Governance. We affirmed our commitment to live into policy governance, with the goal of intentionally shifting back to a governance board by year-end.

B. Executive Director. We are committed to the role of an Executive Director to help guide the Alliance staff in fulfilling the mission of the Alliance, with Board oversight. We are in the process of discerning the timing of an Executive Director hire and/or renewing the search that was previously paused.

C. Staffing. As part of our commitment to being lean, with agile polity with accountability, the Board determined that a restructuring of staff is needed. This process came about as part of our ongoing review of Alliance needs and resources, as well as clarity of roles and responsibilities, now that we have a few years of data to review. Job descriptions are in the process of being drafted and all current staff and contractors will be engaged in the conversations.

While in our meeting, we recognized that we have three (3) Board members who have terms that are expiring at year-end. We will work with our Networks to identify individuals who should be considered for a Board term beginning January 1, 2025. If you know someone who should be considered, please contact your Network leadership team for additional discernment. Thank you. Ideally, we will have individuals identified by October 15, 2024. From a pool of candidates nominated by the Networks, the Board will then make decisions on future Board members. As you may recall, Networks may nominate a Board

candidate, but any individual selected represents Christ first, and then the entire Alliance . . . not just their home Network.

Our focus remains on Jesus and how we can best serve the local church. We believe these decisions will help us launch into the next phase of ministry that originates in our Alliance churches and Networks.

As a reminder, we have the next Alliance Gathering in early 2025. More detailed information will be provided soon.

Thank you for your faithfulness in sharing Jesus one relationship at a time. It is a joy to serve with all of you.

For God's Glory,

Your Alliance Board:

Jamie Dykstra, President

Joel Baar, Past President

Jeff Elzinga, Vice President

Lee Vande Voort, Secretary and Treasurer

Craig Gilbert

Seth Sundstrom

Ryan Hall