"The New Covenant"

Jeremiah 31:31-34

STRENGTH for the Journey with Joe Stowell
Part of the RBC family of Ministries

Group Study Introduction

Use the following questions and exercises as your group time allows. Feel free to skip one or more questions in each section as necessary. If you have less then thirty minutes for group discussion, we recommend skipping the "Getting Started" section. Be sure to save time for prayer at the end of your meeting, using the "Strength through Prayer" section.

Getting Started:

In this segment of Strength for the Journey, Joe Stowell focuses on rule keeping.

- When you were a teenager, how carefully did you follow the rules at home, school, church, and so on?

- How carefully do you follow the rules (formal and informal) now?

Strength through Scripture:

Open your Bibles to Jeremiah 31 and have a volunteer read verses 31–34 out loud.

1. Joe states that he is greatly concerned by how often believers slide back into externalized forms of Christianity: forms that are just about habits, rituals, systems, and efforts not to get caught—and that make for proud, grumpy old saints! To what degree do you share that concern?

2. Turn in your Bibles to Luke 7 and have someone read verses 36–39. How do you think the woman is feeling up to this point in the story? How do you think Simon the Pharisee is feeling?

3. Now have someone read verses 40–50. How do you think the woman feels at the end of the story? How do you think Simon the Pharisee feels?

Notes:

"It will not be like the covenant I made with their forefathers."
Jeremiah 31:32a

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4. What does it mean to you to be part of the new covenant subculture of people called "the forgiven much"?

5. At great risk to Himself, Jesus loved the woman deeply and forgave her of much. And she couldn't wait to love Him back. Similarly, Joe shares that he so longs for a deep understanding of the risks Christ took at the cross for him that he can't wait to tell Jesus how much he loves Him. How much do you identify with that longing?

Digging Deeper:

If your group has enough time (i.e., you've listened to the audio on your own), answer one or more of these optional questions.

1. What does Joe mean when he says, "The better you get, the worse you might become"?

2. Joe states that he is for the biblical rules, as long as they are lived out from a heart of devotion. What are some examples of biblical rules, and what are some examples of man-made "Christian rules"?

3. How do you feel about Joe's statement that Jesus didn't die for nice people who keep all the rules, but rather He died for us because we were born in sin and are deeply offensive to Him in our sins?

Strength through Sharing:

1. Is your Christianity characterized by old covenant, external, law-keeping, rule-keeping systems of external governance? Or have you come to know the joy of the liberty of the new covenant—a life that is lived inside out, from devotion and love for Jesus Christ?

2. Who do you identify with more easily: a member of the Brooklyn Tabernacle Choir with tears of gratitude for being rescued from sin, or someone who feels cheated for not having a testimony like that? If you identify more easily with the second type of person, prayerfully consider the "Call to Action" below.

Notes:

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Strength through Prayer:

Spend a few moments as a group in silent, personal prayer. Thank God for the awesome miracle of forgiveness that comes with the new covenant.

You may want to begin your prayer with these words:

"Lord Jesus, You have forgiven me of much and kept me from much. I love You, Jesus, and I want to gratefully live for You. Empower me by the Holy Spirit to live out my desire and to be devoted to You—as You are so amazingly devoted to me."

When you are finished with this time for silent, personal prayer, you may want to move into a time of group prayer, praying for one another.

Closing Call to Action:

Those of us who have grown up in the church or been in the church world for a long time often face the challenge of feeling that we haven't been forgiven of much. We need to hear the Master say to us, like He did to Joe: "Where would you be today if I hadn't redeemed you? Where would you be if, through the years, the Holy Spirit hadn't been moving you from greed to generosity, from self-centeredness to servanthood, from lust to self-control?"

We truly have been forgiven of much and kept from much. And that gives us a desire to gratefully live for Jesus Christ—to move from duty to true devotion.

Notes:

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