"The New Covenant"

Jeremiah 31:31-34

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

Individual Study Introduction

After listening to the audio segment, use the following questions as your time allows. You may want to record your answers or jot down thoughts and notes in a personal journal. You may also want to use your journal as a record of your prayer time with God. Write out your prayer or simply record your requests and the areas of your life you are releasing to God. This written record will help you to watch God's movement in your life. You'll see more clearly the ways God is giving you "strength for the journey"!

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 or informal) now?

Strength through Scripture:

Read Jeremiah 31:31–34.

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 agree share that concern?

2. Turn in your Bible to Luke 7 and 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?

Notes:

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

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3. Now 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?

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 you have enough time, answer one or more of these optional questions. But be sure to save time for the final two sections.

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 Reflection:

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 in 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."

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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