

# Genesis 17

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[ 0 : 00 ] Well, if you have been with us, you know we are in the middle of a series in the book of Genesis and looking at the Abraham story, and we're going to continue in doing that tonight.

And as we look at it, we're going to look at God cementing and clarifying what it means to make a covenant with Abraham. You know, covenant is not an idea that is a common one in our culture today.

We talk about treaties, we talk about contracts, but neither of those really capture the richness of what the Bible talks about when it talks about a covenant.

In fact, the closest analogy in our culture today is probably that of marriage. Marriage, traditional understanding of marriage, a binding agreement between two parties that in its best form is for the mutual benefit and good of those who enter into it.

It is meant to be a binding promise to enter into relationship with one another for good. Of course, in our world today, even that analogy is breaking down, isn't it?

[ 1 : 17 ] Consider this. According to the Atlantic Monthly in 2014, cohabitation has increased 900% in the last 50 years in our culture.

More and more couples are testing the water before diving into marriage. Census data, check this out. Census data shows that from in 2012, there were 7.8 million couples cohabiting, which is compared to 2.9 million in 1996.

So that's in a span of 18 years, it has tripled in our culture. So if you think it's changing in a perception, and maybe in your perception too, it is.

But the idea of covenant in the old fashion, or the idea of marriage in the sort of old fashioned, and I would say I think biblical sense of it is exactly what we're talking about.

And yet our culture is moving away from it. Why do you think that is? Well, I think it's fundamentally because of fear. I think there are a couple of things.

[ 2 : 27 ] One is that I think we have a fear because we've seen a pattern of impermanent marriages. In the last 50 years, we've seen so many marriages in our culture.

The people we know, the people we love, our parents, our brothers and sisters, our friends, that marriages that were meant to be by God permanent and stable and secure have proven otherwise. And so we have a fear. I don't want to be disappointed. I don't want to be hurt. I don't want to be left high and dry. And so we don't enter into this covenant. Instead, we play with the relationship without the commitment.

I think there's also a culture of independence in our world today. That makes us afraid of making a commitment because if I make a commitment, it might limit me.

If I commit to this person, what if 15 years from now, I meet that person and they might be my soulmate. And now I've missed out on the greatest gift that God could ever give me.

[ 3 : 37 ] I think this is real in our culture today. And maybe you've identified with some of this. Maybe you've struggled with some of these things. But I think this is a reality in our culture that is something that's real about how we think about marriage.

But, you know, I think that we might have the same fears about entering into a covenant with God as well. We wonder, is God going to leave us high and dry?

If I commit myself to Him, like, is He going to take care of me? Is He going to take care of me? Or am I going to find myself alone at some point, abandoned by Him?

And certainly I think that committing ourselves to God feels like limitation, doesn't it? The world says, don't tie yourself down. Don't fall into that old religious trap of right and wrong and good and bad.

This is the challenge I think we face as we come to this story about a God who promises and invites His people to enter into a covenant with Him.

[ 4 : 53 ] That our hearts are captured by fear that this won't actually be good for us. Abraham is the third movement of God in His relationship with humanity.

The first one with Adam and Eve. The second one with Noah were different kinds of covenants that God made with His people to invite them into relationship with Him. And we saw way back in chapter 12 that God began this process of inviting Abraham, initiating a covenant with Him. A covenant of making Abraham and his descendants into a people for God's own glory. That He would gather them into a land where they could shine like lights in the world and display the goodness of the God that they serve.

But as we've seen, if you've been here, even Abraham's journey has had ups and downs. And so God has had to do this again. He reaffirmed it in chapter 15 and now we're back in chapter 17. And this is the third affirmation and invitation into this covenant. So let's look at our passage together.

[ 6 : 08 ] Let's read it together and let's look at it for a few minutes to think about what is it about this covenant? What has God invited Abraham and by extension his people into? This is page 11 in your pew Bibles.

So look, turn all the way to the front. We're looking at Abraham. We're looking at Genesis chapter 17. And we're going to see four things as we look at this.

We're going to walk through it section by section. So let's read verses 1 through 8 together. And before we do this, let me pray. All right. Lord, thank you for your word.

And thank you for the opportunity that we have tonight to look at it. Lord, we ask that you would open our eyes to see you as you truly are. And Lord, open our hearts, Lord, to know, to be moved, Lord, by your spirit, to trust and to love you.

God, I ask that you would help me tonight to speak your words and that you would be at work, Lord, teaching us your word tonight. And we pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.

[ 7 : 18 ] So let's start. Genesis chapter 17, verse 1. When Abram was 99 years old, the Lord appeared to Abram and said to him, I am God Almighty, walk before me and be blameless, that I may make my covenant between you and me and may multiply you greatly.

And then Abram fell on his face. And God said to him, behold, my covenant is with you and you shall be the father of a multitude of nations.

No longer shall your name be called Abram, but your name shall be called Abraham, for I have made you the father of a multitude of nations. I will make you exceedingly fruitful, and I will make you into nations, and the king shall come from you.

And I will establish my covenant between me and you and your offspring after you throughout their generations for an everlasting covenant to be God to you and to your offspring after you.

And I will give to you and to your offspring after you the land of your sojournings, all the land of Canaan for an everlasting possession. And I will be their God.

[ 8 : 32 ] So the first thing we want to see tonight about covenant and God's invitation is that covenant relationships secure a blessing beyond ourselves.

What do I mean by that? Covenant relationships put us in a position to receive something that is beyond our ability to do for ourselves.

And this is what God does when he comes to Abraham. He says, I'm inviting you into a relationship with me. And I want to bring to you blessing. Right?

And we've seen this before. Blessing of a land. Blessing of a people. Your descendants will become, remember the metaphors, as many as the stars in the sky, as many as the grains of sand on the seashore, as many as the particles of dust in the ground.

Your descendants will be numerous beyond counting. And I will make them my people. And the second thing is I will give this people a land.

[ 9 : 34 ] I will put you in this place. And I will give you a place for you to live. And he's pulling on this promise. He says, the land of your sojourning.

So the place where Abraham is sort of living in a tent right now. He says, this is going to be the place where you're going to be permanently soon. But greater than the descendants and greater than the land, as great as that is, look at verses 7 and 8 with me.

Because the greatest thing that God is promising is relationship. Look with me at verse 7. What does he say near the end? I will make a covenant to be God to you.

And then verse 8 he says, and I will be their God. Friends, do you see that this is nothing that Abraham could do on his own?

Remember, the narrator reminded us how old Abraham is. He's now 99 years old. And God is promising him to be the father of a great nation of many nations.

[10:43] That's impossible humanly. It could not happen. But not only that, he's saying, you're going to be able to have all this land for yourself. Well, right now the land is full of warlike people who aren't going to give up that territory easily.

There's no way that Abraham, by himself, could ever claim this land. And even more than that, the God who created the universe has come and says, and I will be your God, and you will be my people.

All of these blessings come externally. There are things that Abraham could never achieve on his own. But God says, come and enter into this relationship with me.

And all of these things are yours. And Abraham, even though he's heard this, we've already seen him fail to grasp the implications. Right?

I will be your God, and I will provide all these things for you in chapter 12. And then what happens at the end of chapter 12? He goes down to Egypt, and he lies about his wife putting her in grave danger, because he doesn't believe that God can protect him.

[11:52] And then we saw last week in chapter 16 that the son hadn't come. There had been no fruit.

There had been no child. How could you do this, God? So Abraham and Sarah cooked up this plan to do it another way. God intervened and said, no, this is not the way.

Don't you see? You can't provide this for yourself. I am going to be the one who will give it to you. And in doing so, I will show myself to be your God, and you will be my people.

Called into a dependent relationship, where we are putting ourselves in a place of both vulnerability, but also a blessing. Because we can't get it on our own, and yet it's the very thing that we most want.

We want to belong. We want to know whose we are. We want security. Where am I going to live? Who's going to take care of me? And God has said, I will give you all of these things.

[12:59] Think about it. Isn't this the ideal parent providing for a child? Maybe you've had a great experience with your parents. Maybe you've had a terrible experience with your parents.

But an ideal parent provides security and safety and a sense of belonging by providing a house to live in, by providing rules to follow, by providing food and comfort and shelter, by giving love and relationship, by even bestowing a name.

You are mine. You are part of my family because of the name that I give to you. And we know that human parents may be, may be, may, may fall short.

In fact, we know human parents will fall short of that ideal. But when God comes to Abram, he says, I am the perfect parent. I am the heavenly father.

And my name is faithful. And I will not fail you. I will not fail you in this covenant. And friends, isn't this what our hearts long for?

[14:07] Isn't this what we, deep in our hearts, want more than anything else? To know where we belong, to know whose we are, to know where we can live and who will take care of us.

And God has come and initiated this covenant with Abram and with all who follow him. So that's the first thing we learn is that covenant relationships secure blessings for us from beyond ourselves.

And then when we get to verses 9 through 14, we see that covenant relationships require a costly sacrifice. So let's read this, 9 through 14.

And God said to Abraham, As for you, you shall keep my covenant, you and your offspring after you throughout their generations. This is my covenant, which you shall keep between me and you and your offspring after you.

Every male among you shall be circumcised. You shall be circumcised in the flesh of your foreskins. And it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and you.

[15:13] He who is eight days old among you shall be circumcised. Every male throughout your generations, whether born in your house or bought with your money, from any foreigner who is not of your offspring, both he who is born in your house and he who is bought with your money, shall

surely be circumcised.

So shall my covenant be in your flesh, an everlasting covenant. And any uncircumcised male who is not circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin shall be cut off from his people.

He has broken my covenant. So if you could see it in the Hebrew, it's a cool thing. Because in verse 3, God comes to Abraham and says, As for me, this is what I'm going to bring to you.

And then you see in verse 9, and it's more clear here, verse 9, then he says, okay, that's my part of the relationship. And now, as for you, this is your part.

And suddenly we're in this very odd world of circumcision, right? Circumcision is the cutting off of the foreskin of a male private part.

[16:23] We're just going to leave it at that for the night. And it was a common practice in the ancient Near East. So this was not created by God.

It was actually something that many of the nations around Abraham at that time would have done. In fact, if you think about it later, the Philistines are mocked by all the nations around them because they're the uncircumcised ones, which in their view made them more beastly and less cultured and more refined.

So anyway, just a side note. But God came to Abraham and said, I want you to enter into this covenant by doing this costly sacrifice as a sign of your response to me.

One Bible commentator put it this way. Whenever, after this day, Abraham would look upon that sign in his body, he would say, I am the man to whom God has made his promises.

This is exactly what God wanted to do, is to have Abraham enter into this agreement in such a physical way, in such a particular way, that it would remind Abraham for the rest of his life that God had made this promise to him and therefore to whom he belonged.

[17:53] This cutting off of the foreskin has other connotations as the scripture sort of unpacks the significance of circumcision.

In Joshua 5, 9, as the people are entering into the promised land and there's a call to circumcise the people who haven't been circumcised because when they were wandering in the wilderness, they didn't have time to wait for them to heal.

So there was a generation who hadn't been circumcised as they wandered in the wilderness. And so as they entered in, Joshua calls people to be circumcised to do this as a way of distinguishing them from the heathens around them.

To say, you need, and the heathen is just being, the other nations that worship other gods. This is a sign of a covenant with a particular God. And so Joshua says, come, in Joshua 5, 9, come and do this again to reaffirm your connection with this God, the God of Abraham and Isaac and Jacob.

And then interestingly, in Deuteronomy 10, verse 16, I'm going to turn there so that we can read it because it's a fascinating move that he does here.

[19:04] Now, Israel, what does the Lord require of you but to fear the Lord your God, to walk in all his ways, to love him, to serve the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and to keep the commandments and statutes of the Lord, which I have commanding you today for your good.

behold, to the Lord your God belongs heaven and the heaven of heavens and the earth and all that is in it. Yet the Lord set his heart in love on your fathers and chose their offspring after him.

You, above all peoples, as you are this day, circumcise, therefore, the foreskin of your heart and be no longer stubborn. And it's a fascinating, again, Deuteronomy is a reaffirmation of the covenant as God's people are entering into the promised land.

But here, Moses points to circumcision not simply as a physical reminder of God's promises to his people, but as a symbol of something greater. It's a cutting off of the sin, of extra, of the flesh that is extra, so that we might see that this is what God wants to do with our hearts.

To cut off our fleshly sinfulness. To cut us off from those things that separate us from God.

[20:31] And offend the God who has invited us into covenant with him. In fact, this is exactly what, if you were here at the beginning, when I read from that passage in Colossians, what the Apostle Paul does.

He says, what circumcision is, is the putting off of the body of flesh. And by that, what he means is not putting off our physical body in its totality, but putting off our sin nature.

Putting off the propensities of our heart, the patterns of our life, the inclinations of our will to reject and rebel against God.

And to go our own way. And to live a life of sin. And so circumcision takes on this whole meaning beyond just this physical sign of a covenant.

But it is a forsaking of an old way and of an old life. It is repentance when we get to the New Testament.

[ 21 : 29 ] Turning away from something and turning towards something else. As God does this work of circumcising our hearts, of freeing us from sin, and taking us in to a relationship with him.

So a covenant relationship often requires costly sacrifice.

And this is partly why what we need to hear in the call of God unto us. Is that God calls us to forsake a life apart from him.

To forsake our sinful patterns. To forsake our proud independence. And to enter in instead into a relationship with him. But we need to make sure that we get the order right.

Romans chapter 4. If you want to turn with me there, I want to look at this really briefly. Because this is important. Romans chapter 4 verse 9.

[ 22 : 31 ] God is talking about Abraham. And how it is that God entered into this covenant with him. And he says this. Verse 9. Is this blessing only for the circumcised?

Or for the uncircumcised? We say that faith was counted to Abraham as righteousness. How then was it counted to him? Was it before or after he had been circumcised?

It was not after, but before he was circumcised. He received the sign of circumcision as a seal of the righteousness that he had by faith.

While he was still uncircumcised. The purpose was to make him the father of all. Who believe without being circumcised. So that the righteousness would be counted to them as well.

And to make him the father of the circumcised. Who are not merely circumcised. But also who walk in the footsteps of the faith of our father Abraham. Had before he was circumcised.

[ 23 : 33 ] Okay. This is jumping. Parachuting into a sort of complicated argument. But what is he saying here? Part of what he's trying to say is the salvation that God has worked through Jesus is for everybody.

It's not just for the Jewish people who are physically circumcised and descendants of Abraham.

He's saying that the true descendants of Abraham are people who are like Abraham in faith.

Why do we know this? Because Abraham believed God and it was credited to him as

righteousness. Not Abraham was circumcised and it was credited to him as righteousness.

This is the distinction. Abraham received the promise and believed in it. And out of the overflow of that as a sign of that was then he responded by being circumcised.

Right? And the reason why this is so important is because we so desperately want to do the right thing so that God will say, okay, you're okay. You've stopped doing something bad.

[ 24 : 40 ] That's enough. That's okay. You're doing good things. That's enough. That's okay. You're giving money. You help the old lady cross the street. Whatever it is. And you think if I can only do the right thing then God will accept me.

And no, what you need to see is instead the way that God works and the way that the covenant works is God comes to us and makes promises and he calls us to trust and believe in that.

And then out of that, the fruit of that is that we repent of our sin and change our lives and turn away from this body of sin.

From our patterns of our flesh. We don't have to clean ourselves up to come to the promise. The promise is the thing that draws us in and frees us so that we can finally turn away.

And this is the incredible work that circumcision of our heart is, is that it's God's work in us when we believe in him. And this is the order of how it works.

[ 25 : 38 ] When we believe in him, God does this work of freeing us from the body of sin that we then respond to by living it out. By living out a pattern of repentance and faith.

When we sin, we repent. We turn away from it. And we believe again in the promises of God. And that's costly. But it's the fruit of what God has done in us, not the cause.

So, circumcision, as much as it was in its initial form, a costly sacrifice that was an external sign.

But God was going after our hearts when he was doing it.

And saying, I actually am going to call you to a greater costliness, but with a greater reward. And based on the promise that I'm making to you. Let's keep going.

We're most of the way there. Verse 15 through 22, let's read together. I'm still looking at Romans.

[ 26 : 41 ] That's not going to be helpful. Let's look at Genesis. Verse 15. And God said to Abram, as for Sarah, your wife.

Remember, as for me, verses 1 through 8. Now to Abram, as for you, and for 9. Now, verse 15. As for Sarah, as for Sarah, your wife, you shall not call her name Sarah.

But Sarah shall be her name. And I will bless her. And moreover, I will give you a son by her. I will bless her. And she shall become nations. Kings of people shall come from her.

Then Abram fell on his face and laughed and said to himself, shall a child be born to a man who is 100 years old? Shall Sarah, who is 90 years old, bear a child?

And Abram said to God, oh, that Ishmael might live before you. And God said, no. But Sarah, your wife, shall bear you a son. And you shall call his name Isaac.

[ 27 : 44 ] I will establish my covenant with him as an everlasting covenant for his offspring after him. And as for Ishmael, I have heard you.

And behold, I have blessed him and will make him fruitful and multiply him greatly. He shall father 12 princes. And I will make him into a great nation. But I will establish my covenant with Isaac, whom Sarah shall bear to you at this time next year.

So, if covenant secures blessings that are beyond us, if covenant requires a costly sacrifice, here we see covenant relationships bring awe and wonder to our lives.

The big question that everyone asks here is, why did Abraham laugh? Right? And it's a good question because what we, because remember what Abraham's circumstance is.

He's now 25 years out from the original encounter. It's been 25 years since God said, I'm going to make you a father. Any of us, when we get 25 years older, are starting to be at the end of our ability to have children.

[ 28 : 55 ] Right? This is just a reality. And Abraham is older than most of us. And so, he's sitting here saying, are you kidding me, God? It's been 25 years.

Are you seriously going to do this? But I don't think it's just that. I think it's also that there's this sense of awe and wonder.

It's not just, it's incredulity. But I don't think it's doubt. Right? When we get to chapter 18, when Sarah laughs, God kind of rebukes her for it. Says, do you really doubt I can do this?

But here, there isn't that sense. It seems to me, and maybe I'm wrong, but it seems to me that when Abraham laughs here, it's this sense of, can you believe this is true?

But not in a doubtful way, but in an overjoyed way. It's like winning the lottery and picking your ticket and saying, can you believe this is actually the one?

[ 29 : 55 ] I think that's what's going on here. There's some fun conversation among the commentators about that. But, and you know, Abraham does have some doubt. He's like, hey, can't you do this through Ishmael?

I've already got a son. Can't you work it through what's already existing? And God reminds him and says, no. No, because that was you trying to do this on your own.

I'm going to do this in a way that's going to bring awe and wonder to you. I'm going to make a hundred-year-old man and a ninety-year-old woman bear a child so that everyone will know that I am the one who did this.

This is not a normal human thing. This is a divine intervention and a divine provision so that you will spend the rest of your life in this awe and wonder.

Can you believe that God gave us this child? And this is what God brings to his covenant relationship with Abraham. He says, I'm going to do wonders among you.

[ 31 : 04 ] Friends, I wonder if we have the awe and wonder about what God has done among us. There are many ways we can see and think about how God has provided for us, how God has taken care of us, how God has protected us.

But friends, the greatest thing of all that he's done is send his son Jesus. And if we ever wonder whether God is there and whether God has acted towards us for our good, we can look to the historical reality of Jesus Christ, his crucifixion and his resurrection.

And then, as we sing sometimes, let us sing with awe, with joy, with wonder at what God has done for us in that.

So covenant relationships bring an unbelievable blessing beyond our ability. They ask for sacrifice. Thirdly, they create in us awe and wonder as we marvel at God doing what only God could do.

And then finally, in verses 23 through 27, covenant relationships require a wholehearted commitment. Starting in verse 22.

[ 32 : 25 ] When he had finished talking with him, God went up from Abraham. Then Abraham took Ishmael, his son, and all those born in his house, or bought with his money every male among the men of Abraham's house, and he circumcised the flesh of their foreskins.

That very day, as God had said to him, Abraham was 99 years old when he was circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin. And Ishmael, his son, was 13 years old when he was circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin.

That very day, Abraham and his son Ishmael were circumcised, and all the men of his house, those born in the house and those bought with money from a foreigner, were circumcised with him.

The narrator here wraps up this story by talking about Abraham's response. And what I want you to see is that it is complete, and it is comprehensive, and it is immediate.

That very day is repeated multiple times. Abraham's response was that very day. And he made everyone in his household submit to it. Okay? From the youngest child to the oldest man.

[ 33 : 35 ] It might have been more costly for the older men than for the young child. But everyone did it without delay. No one was left out.

God immediately, or Abraham immediately and comprehensively responded to this. And what we see is Abraham maybe taking one more step and finally getting this covenant relationship and the greatness of this invitation that God says, Yes, God, I am all in with you.

I am all in with you. And so I'm going to make everyone under my authority, everyone in my household, take this step of entering in and bearing this sign of a covenant with you.

And friends, as we think about this, we need to be careful. We live in a culture today where when we talk about believing in something, it can often be a very casual thing.

I believe in UFOs. I believe that JFK wasn't murdered. I believe that Elvis Presley is still alive. We talk about belief in all sorts of ways. Some of them are crazy. Some of them are not.

[ 34 : 48 ] But we talk about it in a very lighthearted way. And easy believism can easily creep into the church. I believe in Jesus. But it's not a wholehearted, immediate, and comprehensive response.

It's a very surfacy. I believe in Jesus as long as it fits into my life and as long as he does what I want and as long as I'm happy with whatever he's doing in my life. That's good enough for me.

God wants not just a sense of a truth, not just an agreement about a certain formula, but he wants a wholehearted trust.

And you can see how hard this was for Abraham because he struggled already twice. He's received this promise and failed to really trust in it. And God is saying, graciously pursuing him, saying, come on, believe me, trust me, take this step of faith.

And he does and he responds. And even though he struggled with that, and just like we do, and it's good to know that God's grace is with us through that struggle.

[ 35 : 57 ] The arc of the story and the tagline of Abraham is that he believed God. This is what his life was about, is that he believed God. Not perfectly, not always, but he believed God and it was credited to him as righteousness.

And so we have to have our cultural aversion to commitment challenged. We need to recognize that God calls us not halfway, but wholehearted.

Not partially, but comprehensively. All of our lives being committed to a covenant relationship with him. And what about our fears?

Will God leave us? Will we fail the covenant? What if we're not good enough and we can't keep it ourselves? What if we lose our independence in all of this?

Well, friends, this is the good news of the gospel. Is that God in his covenant with his people knew, even from the very beginning, that we would never keep the covenant perfectly.

[ 37 : 05 ] We'd never trust him wholeheartedly. We always struggle and we always fail. We ask that God's not God in the world. We don't trust him. And yet, in this, that he saw from long ago, he said, I will provide for you.

And so Jesus Christ came. And when Jesus came, he kept the covenant that we couldn't keep with God. He was the one who came and lived the life that we ought to have lived, a perfect faith and trust in Christ. Do you remember back in chapter 15 when God made the covenant and he cut the animals in half and the pot walked through it and said, I'm, you know, the idea there, the image

there is he walks through and says, may God do this to me if I don't keep the covenant? But Abraham was asleep. Abraham didn't walk through the animals. Abraham didn't make that commitment. God was the one who walked through to say, I'm not only making this covenant, but I'm going to keep it. I'm going to be the one who does this for you. And that's exactly what Christ did. And though we as human beings failed and sinned and rebelled against God, Jesus came and he lived a perfect life of obedience and perfect covenant keeping. And so he established the rightness of a covenant with God that we could never do. And then he willingly then took that life and he offered it up for us on our behalf. And he was cut off. Remember the last verse of this? If you're not circumcised, you get cut off. Jesus says, I'm going to be that person for you. I will be cut off from the people of God. I will suffer the judgment and be cast out and suffer condemnation and death for you. And this is what God did for us in Christ. He secured for us a benefit that we could never do on our own by our own covenant keeping because he kept the covenant for us. And he freed us from the penalty of our covenant breaking by taking it upon himself. And he secured for us the wonder and the awe of our salvation. And this is what Christ has done for us. And he calls us to wholehearted response to this. To believe and to trust and to follow and to make commit all of our lives to following him in all of our particulars. To repent from our sin and turn away from it and to turn towards him. But to do that in the context of knowing that he has already established this covenant forever with us. And that as we, by faith, walk into it and trust in it and hold on to it and receive it from him, all the blessings of being God's people will be ours.

[ 40 : 00 ] Let's pray. God, we thank you for the work that you have done for us in Christ. And we thank you for Abraham and for his faith. Lord, we ask that you would give us tonight, Lord, by your grace, the gift of faith. Lord, that we would believe and trust that you are a faithful and a glorious God who has given us great things in Christ. Lord, belonging and security, certainty and hope. Lord, and that you will hold us.

Lord, that we will be your God, that we will be your people and that you will be our God forever. Lord, we pray these things in Jesus' name. Amen.