

## **Words Forming Witnesses**

### **The Core Covenant**

**Psalm 36:5-10 and Genesis 12:1-2  
(510, 478, 20, 648)**

**January 20, 2013**

Nine years ago, I decided to get serious  
about taking care of my physical being.

Letting your physical health take second-place  
to lots of other things – especially to busyness –  
is an occupational hazard of professors and preachers,  
in my experience.

We don't eat well, exercise, or oscillate –  
that important discipline of working and resting,  
working and resting,  
working and resting,  
in a regular rhythm.

Back in those days, I weighed 25 lbs more than I do now,  
was 4 inches wider around the waist,  
and struggled to do 10 sit ups.

For my body type,  
and there are a great range of body types  
in this wonderfully diverse creation God has crafted,  
that was not good news for my long-term well-being.

What was particularly important in making this transition,  
in leaving behind much of an old life style  
that neglected good physical health  
was building my core strength –  
the strength of the core region of my body  
in the middle around the waist, back, front, and sides.  
This region, I discovered,  
was of central importance in aligning and enabling the body  
to function well.

This is not a sermon about becoming a fitness fanatic.  
I'm still all over the place  
in developing a consistent discipline  
of physical exercise and healthy eating.  
My great weakness remains too much sugar,

as those of you who watch me eat lunch after church  
can readily attest.

But I do want to use the idea of a strong physical body,  
especially a body that is strong in its core,  
as a way of drawing attention to the importance  
of our passage to memorize and ponder this week.

This is the covenant  
that gives the whole Bible its core strength.

This is the covenant  
that every other promise of God in history is grounded in.

This is the covenant  
that gets us back on track  
over and over again  
as we wander about in the wildernesses of our lives  
seeking security, affection, and strength  
in all the wrong places.

What's a covenant in the Bible?

It's an arrangement with humanity  
initiated by God's desire to be in relationship with us.  
God inaugurates the Biblical covenants  
by creating us in the divine image,  
both male and female,  
and continuing steadfastly to long for and strive for  
an intimate relationship with his beloved humans.

God promises, out of divine grace,  
to give his chosen people  
strength and peace  
to be used to work with him  
to bless all nations of the earth  
and the earth itself.

That's what being connected to God means for human beings –  
they are blessed in order to be a blessing.

The people chosen in this covenant,  
Abraham and all his descendants,  
promise, out of deep gratitude for this divine favour,  
to be in fellowship with God and follow his guidance.

The history of this covenant relationship,  
its ups and downs, its successes and failures,  
is the stuff of the Biblical story.

In our memorizing and pondering this coming year,  
we will be following the main story line –  
God's faithfulness in calling his chosen people to their faithfulness  
in blessing the world with faith, hope, and love.

That story culminates in God's acting in Jesus Christ  
to broaden the invitation of this covenant to include all of humanity.

But it all goes back to the simple but profound covenant  
we are considering this morning.

*I will make of you a great nation,  
and I will bless you, and make your name great,  
so that you will be a blessing.*

It is this promise-making Word of care  
that invites a responding faith that is caring.

This covenanting Word of God,  
eventually seen most clearly in the life and work of Jesus Christ,  
invites us into greater consciousness and appreciation  
of the source and sustenance of our lives.

At some deep and primordial level,  
it resonates with our longing to flourish.

In this covenant, we enjoy life in all its fullness.  
We are moved from death to life.  
We are enabled, by God's grace, to flourish in God's service.  
That is life as it is meant to be.

But there is another aspect of this passage that I worth noting.

To live into this covenant,  
Abram and Sarai, together with their family and community,  
have to leave stuff behind.

They have to move on.  
They have to follow God into a different future,  
one they had not imagined yet.

The old ways were not adequate to live faithfully  
in this new core covenant.  
New ways of being and living had to be developed.

There was a new strength and alignment to be built up,  
one that made this new people a real blessing to the world.  
It was in becoming that blessing that their name would be great.

So, the life and faith that arise from this core covenant –  
I will bless you to be a blessing,  
love you so you can love –  
provokes change in our lives.

It opens for us the potential for change  
not only in the physical dimension I mentioned earlier,  
but also at the emotional, intellectual, and spiritual dimensions of our beings.  
Indeed, when all of these dimensions of our energy  
are aligned around the core of this covenant,  
then we are indeed flourishing.

If we let God be God,  
rather than try and control God to make faith comfortable to us,  
then we are going to be led into new ways of using our gifts and abilities  
in the service of God's desire to bless the whole creation  
with peace and justice.

That vision of SHALOM or well-being for the whole of creation  
is the core purpose for the covenant.  
That is the purpose that drives a covenant life with God.

The invitation is there.  
As we know from God's promise to us in Jesus Christ,  
it will not be withdrawn.

Everywhere we go,  
every opportunity we encounter,  
every possibility we enjoy,  
is filled with the potential of this promise.

We simply have to say "Yes" to flourishing in the grace of Jesus Christ.

*Be confident that the Holy Spirit will use these words  
to form us to flourish in our witness to the grace of Jesus Christ.*

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