

Planning

LECTIONARY

Jeremiah 31.31-34, Psalm 51.1-12 or 119.9-16, Hebrews 5.5-10, John 12.20-33

Context

Jeremiah writes to the Israelites exiled in Babylon, who have believed that they could only worship in Jerusalem, telling them their exile will last 70 years but they can both worship and integrate with society, because God is sovereign.

Read **Jeremiah 31.31-34** and reflect on it. Notes to help you understand this passage can be found on the website [WEB](#) or in *Adult & All Age* magazine.

Common thread – Heart of the covenant (Jeremiah 31.31-34)

This week the ROOTS resources look at the establishment of the new covenant – a new relationship with his people that God creates and promises to sustain.

Seasonal

Season setting p.6; Prayers and music p.8; Activities and drama p.10; Art and craft p.12.

Additional resources for Lent can be found in ROOTS *Children & Young People* and *Adult & All Age* issue 39 (January/February 2009).

PLUS

Take-home sheet [WEB](#)

Downloadable activities for parents and children.

Short story [WEB](#)

Another way of opening up the issues of today's reading.

Songs and music

Abba, Father, let me be; Come, let us sing of a wonderful love; Higher, higher, KS, TS, SOF; I'm special; In everything that I do, JP, KS; Jesus, thank you for the cross, KS; Lift his name high, KS; Lord, I lift your name on high; Thank you, Jesus; What kind of man was this, CHY; Will you come and follow me?

More hymns and songs for this issue are listed on p.8 and on the [WEB](#).

Archive [WEB](#)

These readings were covered on 06.04.2003 and 02.04.2006.

ROOTS resources

Look at ROOTS *Adult & All Age* magazine for further ideas.

Book

Mama, do you love me?, Barbara M. Joesse; *Guess how much I love you*, Sam McBratney.

Film [Dumbo](#), [U](#)

TIP OF THE WEEK

Not all children will have experienced unconditional love in their home lives. Think through how they may react to the subject material before the session starts, not during it!

HEART OF THE COVENANT

Gather

Gathering activity

Before the session, create a photo montage using photos from magazines. The pictures should depict unconditional love, e.g. a mother and her baby. Include a wide variety of people in different situations. You might like to choose one picture and explain to the children how you think it shows unconditional love. Use this as an opportunity to explain the idea of unconditional love.

Alternatively, read the story *Guess how much I love you* (see *Planning*).

Gathering prayer

Loving God,
we are your children. We know you love us,
and so we gather ready to worship you.
Amen.

Open the Word

Based on *Jeremiah 31.31-34*

A responsorial setting.

- Set the tone for worship by using either silence or quiet background music to draw the children together.
- At the end of each verse, there should be a deliberate short pause before everyone joins in with the refrain in bold. As this is an act of worship, do not be afraid to take your time. If you have sufficient people, divide the group, half to say refrain A, and half refrain B.

Leader The Lord says, 'The days are surely coming when I will make a new covenant.'

Refrain A **What's the new covenant?**

Refrain B **You are God's and God is yours.**

Leader The Lord says, 'It won't be like the covenant made in the past when I took the people by the hand to lead them out of Egypt. They broke that covenant.'

Refrain A **What's the new covenant?**

Refrain B **You are God's and God is yours.**

Leader The Lord says, 'This is the covenant that I will make: I will put my law within them and I will write it on their hearts.'

Refrain A **What's the new covenant?**

Refrain B **You are God's and God is yours.**

Leader The Lord says, 'Hear the covenant that I will make: I will be their God and they shall be my people.'

Refrain A **What's the new covenant?**

Refrain B **You are God's and God is yours.**

Leader The Lord says, 'Here is the covenant that I will make: No longer shall they teach one another or say to each other, "Know the Lord."'

Refrain A **What's the new covenant?**

Refrain B **You are God's and God is yours.**

Leader The Lord says, 'Listen to the covenant that I will make: They shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest.'

Refrain A **What's the new covenant?**

Refrain B **You are God's and God is yours.**

Leader The Lord says, 'This is the covenant that I will make: I will forgive their wickedness and remember their wrongdoing no more.'

All **We are God's and God is ours. together**

With older children

Assign each of the verses to older children to read. If you have a larger group, use groups rather than individuals. Everyone should say the refrain. Let them rehearse a couple of times so that they become confident and able to do it at a steady pace.

With younger children

Ask the children to hold hands and form a circle. Sing the song, *God's love is like a circle* to the tune of *Puff the Magic Dragon* as the children first move round to the right and then back again.

God's love is like a circle,
a circle big and round.
And when you see a circle
no ending can be found.
That's how it is with God's love,
it goes on eternally,
forever and forever more,
I know that God loves me.

Other ways of opening the Word are on p.32 and on the [WEB](#).

CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

Talk about

These simple discussion starters have no right or wrong answers. Use the questions to encourage your children to explore their own, and each other's, ideas.

- The people had spent a long time in the desert and had broken the covenant on many occasions. Make links with previous weeks' conversations about the covenant. Talk about:

Why do you think they broke the covenant?

How do you think the people felt?

Why do you think they felt that way?

What do you think the people could do to make things right?

- Even though the people had broken the covenant so many times, God continued to love them. No strings. No expectations. God just loved them. That's what's called unconditional love. Give the children some examples of unconditional love, perhaps reminding them of the *Gathering activity*. *What do you think it means to be loved unconditionally?*

Do you love anyone unconditionally?

How would this affect the way you treat them?

How can you let people know how much you love them?

- The new covenant gives the assurance that we are claimed by God, that God knows us and we know him. Talk about:

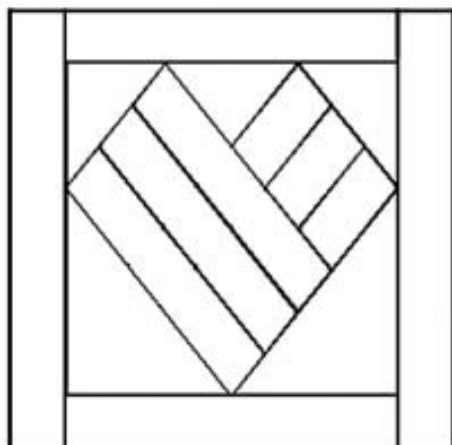
What do you know about God?

Do you know him as well as the people in your own family?

How does it feel to be known by God?

What difference does it make to the way you live your life to be known and loved by God?

What difference should it make?



Rainbow quilted heart template [WEB](#)

Respond to

The winding path

This activity should illustrate to the children the difference between life under the old covenant and life under the new covenant.

You will need: a three-metre piece of string; a blindfold.

- Lay out the string along the floor (it does not matter if there are joins in the string). The children are going to follow along it but you want to make it as difficult as possible so include twists and turns appropriate to the ability of the group.
- Blindfold the children one by one, and ask them to follow the string along only by walking on top of it. They are not allowed to reach down and feel for it.
- As soon as they go off track, send them back to the beginning.
- Let everyone have a turn. Second time around, let them follow the string without having to wear a blindfold.
- Once everyone has finished make a point of the fact that nobody was able to stick to the string without going off course. Liken the experience on their first attempt to living under the old covenant, where the people tried, but kept failing, and then liken the second attempt to living under the new. Now God has revealed his way to us it is easier to follow.

Rainbow quilted heart

You will need: A4 sheets of card (one for each child), rainbow heart template [WEB](#), scraps of ribbon, card and fabrics, glue sticks, coloured pens.

- Copy the template [WEB](#) onto the A4 card.
- Invite the children to use coloured ribbons, card and the fabrics to decorate the heart and the rest of the card.
- Make each strip on the heart a different colour of the rainbow.

Younger children could be helped to write 'God loves me' in the border spaces.

Older children could use the border spaces to write a memory verse: 'I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts'.

One to one

We do not always get the time to spend quality time with individual children; this week, as we consider unconditional love, make the time to do so.

- While the children are engaged in another activity, find time to sit with each of them individually.
- Spend a minute or so chatting to them, making a point of really listening to them and concentrating on what they say.
- After you have finished, thank them and tell them that they are very special. Give them a sticker to wear that says 'I'm special'.
- Enjoy the conversations you have; you are trying to replicate something of the unconditional love of God for us. Try to focus on the child and not on everything else that is happening.

God is love prayer

- Invite everyone to say a short prayer for the person on their right, saying thank you to God for the special person next to them. Bring the prayer time to a close with the following prayer.

Loving God,

no matter who we are, or what we do, you are there for us.

You know us, each and every one: our names, our likes, and our loves.

You know all the good things about us and all the bad, and still you love us so. Every day you care for us, morning, noon and night.

You have opened your heart to us and we love you with all our hearts.

Amen.

Send out

Give the children a copy of the *Take-home sheet* and send them out with this prayer.

Known by you and loved by you, we go on our way, carrying your love inside us in all we do through the coming week.

Don't forget to look at pp.6-13 and pp.32-33 for additional ideas.

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PLUS

Songs and music

This thankful heart; I will sing of your love forever; All are welcome. This love, Storm; Higher, Deeper, wider, higher; Love, Pennells, Porter and Thomas; Let my words be few, Matt Redman; Amazing, Matt Redman; Love is a miracle, Delirious; Arms of love, Matt Weeks and Rachel Blackledge; This love, Mary Mary; Bleeding love, Leona Lewis.

More hymns and songs for this issue are listed on p.8 and on the [WEB](#).

Archive [WEB](#)

These readings were covered on 06.04.2003 and 02.04.2006.

ROOTS resources

Look at ROOTS *Adult & All Age* magazine for further ideas.

Film

Airport scene at the beginning of *Love Actually* [15](#)

TIP OF THE WEEK

Be sensitive to personal situations: not all young people will have experienced unconditional love in their home lives. Think through how they may react to the subject material before the session starts, not during it!

HEART OF THE COVENANT

Gather

Gathering activity

This activity is designed to introduce the theme of love, which is at the heart of the covenant.

You will need: a large sheet of paper with the following Greek words written on it: Storge, Phileo, Eros, Agape; pens.

- Ask the group to write on the sheet anything they can think of to do with the words.
- Explain that they are different names for love in Greek.
- Ask them if they know the difference or what kind of love they represent. Storge: affection, as of a parent for a child; phileo: friendship, loyalty to friends; eros: passionate love, with sensual desire; agape: unselfish, generous, looks after others.

Gathering prayer

In the conflict of the world and our lives, we come together to learn about your love for us and how we can touch the hearts of others.

Amen.

Open the Word

Based on Jeremiah 31.31-34

A Bible study to compare the old covenant and the new covenant.

Old covenant vs. new covenant

You will need: copy of Jeremiah 31.31-34, Genesis 9.8-17, Genesis 17.1-7,15-16, Exodus 20.1-17, Numbers 21.4-9, pens and paper.

- This reading explores the beginning of our understanding of the new covenant with God; the new covenant that was to be made between God and his people through Jesus Christ. This covenant would be superior to the old one, a covenant of love.
- Remind the group of the covenants that were covered in the past weeks, the covenant with Noah and the earth, the one with Abraham and Sarah and the covenant God made with the people of Israel.
- Invite the young people to identify some of the characteristics of the old covenant from

Genesis 9.8-17, Genesis 17.1-7,15-16, Exodus 20.1-17, Numbers 21.4-9. This could be done in small groups depending on the number of people present.

- The characteristics might include:
 - The covenant between God, Noah and the earth is two sided, God would never send a flood again and Noah had to be faithful to God's promise.
 - The covenant between God and Abraham was a very personal one. God promised Abraham descendants as plentiful as the stars, Abraham had to be faithful.
 - The covenant with God and the people of Israel was based upon the Ten Commandments, written on stone, a very external contract.
- Invite the young people to identify some of the characteristics of the new covenant from Jeremiah 31.31-34. These might include:
 - The new covenant affects people more deeply – God's law will be within them, written on their hearts.
 - In the new covenant, we will know God. Knowing someone means relationship.
 - This is a new relationship between God and his people; a loving God who is forgiving and all loving.
- The new covenant with God is ultimately about relationship. A deep, personal relationship based on the love of God. A relationship that isn't interested in a tick box morality (What sins have I committed that week or last?) but in changed hearts. From the very centre of our being we like to be connected to God.
- Invite the young people to reflect in silence about one aspect of God's love for them. Ask them to do this in the context of the types of love identified in the exercise.



Other ways of opening the Word are on p.30 and on the [WEB](#).

CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

Talk about

Love actually

A discussion about the place of love.

You will need: the opening sequence of the film *Love Actually* or a copy of the quote for everyone to see.

Clips of this opening scene are available on the Internet. Type 'Love Actually opening scene' into your search engine. Play the clip to your group.

Do you agree that love actually is all around us?

How is love expressed within your family and friendship situations? What type of love is expressed according to the Greek definitions in the Gathering activity?

How is love expressed in the broader community?

The loveliest thing ever

The new covenant with God is a deep and meaningful relationship between God and his people. He put a new relationship into our hearts. God did a lovely thing for us. A way that we can know and measure love is in our relationships with each other.

What is the loveliest thing that someone has ever done for you?

How do you feel when someone does something lovely for you?

What is the loveliest thing that you have ever done for someone else?

How do you feel when you do something lovely for another person?

All loving God

None of the covenants we looked at in *Open the Word* were relational in the same way as this new covenant is set out to be. But God is interested in a deep and meaningful relationship with us.

How do we get to know people?

Can we get to know God in the same way?

How do we grow in our relationships with others?

How can we grow in our relationship with God?

Respond to

Hearty quotes quiz

This quiz is full of quotes of famous people's idea of love.

You will need: sets of 12 strips of paper with the quotes and 12 strips of paper with the speakers on them.

- Divide the young people into teams, and give each team a set of 24 strips with quotes and speakers.
- Ask them to try to match each quote with the person who said it.
- Invite them to select their favourite quote.

'Being popular and loved by people in universal ways is absolutely no substitute for truly being loved.' Madonna

'The greatest evil is the lack of love and charity.' Mother Teresa

'Grant that I may not so much seek to be loved as to love.' Saint Francis of Assisi

'He who loves 50 people has 50 woes; he who loves no one has no woes.' Buddha

'All you need is love, love, love is all you need.' Beatles

'Where there is love there is life.' Gandhi

'Love grants in a moment what toil can hardly achieve in an age.' Johan Wolfgang von Goethe

'The supreme happiness of life is the conviction that we are loved.' Victor Hugo

'Greater love has no man than this; that a man lay down his life for his friends.' Jesus

'One man come in the name of love, one man come and go.' U2

'Your love means everything.' Coldplay

'Love bears all things.' St Paul

From the bottom of my heart

A fun activity.

- Invite the group to stand or sit in a circle.
- One person turns to the person next to them and says phrase one: 'If you love me from the bottom of your heart will you please, please smile?'
- They reply with phrase two: 'You know I love you from the bottom of my heart, but I just can't smile.'
- The second person then turns to the next person in the circle and repeats phrase one, etc.
- Any person who smiles or laughs is out.

In my heart

A prayer activity.

You will need: heart shape slips of paper or sticky notes, pens or pencils, love track album and the means to play it.

- Ask the young people to select one of the quotes from the *Hearty quotes quiz*. Encourage them to choose the one which they feel speaks to them the most.
- Invite the young people to write the quote on one side of their heart shape.
- Then invite them to turn the heart over and on the back, write their own description of love, or a sentence about what it means.
- Invite the young people to gather in a circle and share a moment or two of silence. Play a love track that you feel will speak most to your group (e.g. 'I want to know what love is', Foreigner) and invite them to create a group heart with their individual slips.

Send out

Leader proclaims to the young people

God claims you, and knows you
and you will know God.

Young people reply:

Lord, you have written your name
on our hearts,
you are claiming us.
Let us go out with love,
let us show your love in this world.
Amen.

Don't forget to look at pp.6-13
and pp.30-31 for additional ideas.