Hold Fast to the Covenant

This session covers:

- What it means to “hold fast to the covenant”
- Why holding fast to the covenant is important in the end times
- Four ways to hold fast to the covenant

This session corresponds to:

- Chapters 1 and 6 of Understanding Your Inheritance in Christ book
- Session 7 of Understanding Your Inheritance in Christ CDs

An Invitation to Every Believer

1. The Bible exhorts us to hold fast to God’s covenant promises.

- So far in this class, we have examined in detail the concept of a covenant and the blessings promised to the believer through covenant.
- In this session and the next, we will look at some principles that will help us experience the covenant blessings that produce a rich life in God.
- Through the Prophet Isaiah, God says, “Everyone who…holds fast My covenant; even those I will bring to My holy mountain and make them joyful in My house of prayer” (Isa. 56:6-7).
- Here is a basic truth. God blesses those who hold fast to His covenant and the promises that are ours through covenant. And every believer is exhorted to hold fast to the covenant promises of God.

2. To fully experience God’s promises, we must learn to hold fast to the covenant.

- Many people have been taught that God may want us to live in health or He may have chosen for us to
struggle with infirmity. Many have been taught that God may want to prosper us or He may not. Many have developed a false view of God believing His favor is selective, thinking that God bestows favor on some and withholds it from others.

- Even though every believer has access to all the blessings of God, many are living in spiritual poverty.
- To experience a breakthrough that leads to a blessed life, we must learn to hold fast to the covenant. In other words, we must learn to believe, pray, and stand on the promises that are given to us through God’s covenants—no matter what is happening around us.

3. To hold fast to the covenant, we must live by the truth of the Word rather than the circumstances of life.

- Jesus prayed, “Sanctify them in the truth; Your word is truth” (John 17:17).
- The Word of God is reality. No matter what we see, what is happening around us, what we feel or think, the Word of God is what is real—the Word is truth.
- To live by covenant, we must learn to live by the Word of God and not be moved by our circumstances. No matter what we see, what we feel, think, or experience, we hold fast to the covenant by believing what the Word of God promises. We must hold fast to God’s covenant promises no matter what kind of trial or tribulation is afflicting us.
- As we learn to hold fast to God’s covenant, we will experience breakthroughs that lead to a blessed life.

Critical in the End-Times

1. As we approach the return of the Lord Jesus, the earth will be shaken by wars, natural disasters, famine, lawlessness, and persecution.

- In the days approaching Christ’s return, life will become progressively more difficult.
- Both the glory of the Lord and deep darkness will fill the earth. In the parable of the wheat and tares, Jesus said that the kingdom of heaven may be compared to a man who sowed good seed. While the good seed was being sown, an enemy was sowing tares among the wheat (Matt. 13:24-25).
- In this parable, Jesus teaches that the end of the age will culminate with both good and evil maturing. The great end-time harvest of souls will be reaped, the righteous sons of God will shine forth like the sun, and the sons of the evil one will become completely lawless and depraved.
- Just as wheat is harvested when it has fully matured, Jesus teaches that lawlessness and everything that is offensive to the kingdom of God will also come to full maturity (Matt. 13:41).
- Isaiah prophesied that the earth will be shaken as an olive tree in the last days. He wrote: “The new wine mourns, the vine decays, all the
merry-hearted sigh. The gaiety of tambourines ceases, the noise of revelers stops, the gaiety of the harp ceases. They do not drink wine with song; strong drink is bitter to those who drink it. The city of chaos is broken down; every house is shut up so that none may enter. There is an outcry in the streets concerning the wine; all joy turns to gloom. The gaiety of the earth is banished. Desolation is left in the city and the gate is battered to ruins. For *thus it will be in the midst of the earth among the peoples, as the shaking of an olive tree, as the gleanings when the grape harvest is over*” (Isa. 24:7-13).

- Jesus said, “You will be hearing of wars and rumors of wars. See that you are not frightened, for those things must take place, but that is not yet the end. For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom” (Matt. 24:6-7).

- In the Book of Revelation, John also wrote of war in the last days: “And another, a red horse, went out; and to him who sat on it, it was granted to take peace from the earth, and that men would slay one another; and a great sword was given to him” (Rev. 6:4).

- John also wrote, “The number of the armies of the horsemen was two hundred million; I heard the number of them. And this is how I saw in the vision the horses and those who sat on them: the riders had breastplates the color of fire and of hyacinth and of brimstone; and the heads of the horses are like the heads of lions; and out of their mouths proceed fire and smoke and brimstone. A third of mankind was killed by these three plagues, by the fire and the smoke and the brimstone which proceeded out of their mouths” (Rev. 9:16-18).

- Massive natural disasters will also characterize the last days. The Book of Revelation declares that great earthquakes will shake the nations, that the stars of the sky will fall to the earth, and that the mountains and islands will be moved from their places (Rev. 6:12-14). There will be locusts swarming the earth (Rev. 9:3) and the waters will become undrinkable (Rev. 8:11).

- This unfathomable upheaval will cause unprecedented economic chaos (Rev. 18:11-17), disease, pestilence, and famine. In fact, the Book of Revelation describes a severe worldwide famine: “When the Lamb broke the fourth seal, I heard the voice of the fourth living creature saying, ‘Come.’ I looked, and behold, an ashen horse; and he who sat on it had the name Death; and Hades was following with him. Authority was given to them over a fourth of the earth, to kill with sword and with famine and with pestilence and by the wild beasts of the earth” (Rev. 6:7-8).

- The evil of the last days will not be restricted to wars and natural disasters. Lawlessness will increase, resulting in tremendous upsurges in crime, murder, and terrorism.

- In the midst of these unimaginable tribulations, true Christians and Jews will experience increasing persecution. Around the world, it will be politically correct to honor every religion of the earth except Judaism and Christianity. These two groups will become increasingly unacceptable to the world system until every person will be forced to take the mark of the beast or be killed (Rev. 13:16-18). Both Christians and Jews will be martyred because of their allegiance to God.
2. In these challenging days, God promises a place of safety for His bondservants.

- Just as God set apart the Hebrew nation in Goshen, He will prepare a place of safety for His people during the end-time tribulations. Goshen was the place where God's people lived while they dwelt in Egypt. When God's plagues were sent upon the Egyptians, God set the Israelites apart in Goshen and protected them from the plagues. They were sheltered from the swarms of flies and from the hailstorms (Ex. 8:22, 9:26). God prepared a place of safety for His people while His judgments were released in the land of Egypt.

- Other places in Scripture describe God's protection during the tribulations of the last days. Jesus told the church at Philadelphia, "Because you have kept the word of My perseverance, I also will keep you from the hour of testing, that hour which is about to come upon the whole world, to test those who dwell on the earth" (Rev. 3:10).

- In Revelation 7:1-3, John writes, "After this I saw four angels standing at the four corners of the earth, holding back the four winds of the earth, so that no wind would blow on the earth or on the sea or on any tree. And I saw another angel ascending from the rising of the sun, having the seal of the living God; and he cried out with a loud voice to the four angels to whom it was granted to harm the earth and the sea, saying, 'Do not harm the earth or the sea or the trees until we have sealed the bond-servants of our God on their foreheads.'"

- As these end-time tribulations increase in severity, the shelter of the Most High is available to sincere, devoted followers of Jesus. Even though many believers will be martyred, God also promises to protect His people. Whether in cities of refuge or by His invisible shield, God will protect His people from the severe tribulations of the end-times.

3. As these difficult days draw near, we must learn to hold fast to the covenant.

- Though God will preserve and protect us in the end-times, we must learn to hold fast to God's covenant promises.

- The following excerpt from a prophetic word given on September 24, 2008 shows how God will cause His people to prosper even during difficult times:

  As I see these things [economic problems facing America], I hear the encouragement of God to His Isaacs in the earth who sow in the times of famine and reap 100 fold in the year. I'm not a prosperity preacher, I'm a prophet. And God is saying that September [2008] will convince you that you must connect to His economic system. There are always the few that are greatly blessed when the majority is shaken, threatened and fearful.¹

- In the end-times, all the godless props that we have depended upon will be removed until it is just God and us. We can no longer depend
on a good economy for our finances. We will not be able to depend on our health care system for our health. We can not depend upon our police for our safety.

- A day is coming when God is the only One we can depend on. And when that day comes, we will have to depend on God's covenant promises to us.
- That is why we must learn to hold fast to the covenant now—before things get really difficult and challenging. In the days ahead, God's covenant promises will be the only thing that we can rely on.

Four Ways to Hold Fast to the Covenant

1. **Know that the promises of God are ours through covenant.**

   - There is a tremendous difference between knowing that God has made promises to His children and knowing that He has spoken these same promises through a covenant He entered on our behalf.
   - A promise secured by a covenant is a promise secured by the very life of the one making the promise. Remember in Session 1 that God had made a promise to Abraham (Gen. 12). Years had passed and Abraham was not sure that God would fulfill His promise to him. He asked God, "How can I know that you will do what you have promised." God's response was to cut covenant with Abraham (Gen. 15).
   - Abraham knew that the promise would be fulfilled at some point in time because it was secured by a covenant.
   - The same is true for us. When a promise is secured by a covenant, then we can be confident that the promise will be fulfilled.
   - In this class, we have seen many great promises of a blessed life in Christ. We have seen that God promises salvation, eternity with Jesus, healing, provision, freedom from the curse of sin, death, and the law, destiny, success, protection, and a blessed family.
   - The great news is that these wonderful promises have been made available and secured by covenant. Because of the New Covenant cut between the Father and the Son, which was validated by the resurrection of Jesus from the dead, we can be fully confident that the Father's promises to us will be fulfilled.
   - We can hold fast to the covenant when we know that God's promises are secured by His covenants.

2. **Understand that our heavenly Father has directed His lovingkindness toward His covenant people.**

   - This principle helps us understand that God is faithful to His covenant promises. As we know that the promises of God are secured by covenant and as we understand how committed God is to fulfill His Word in our lives, we will be empowered to hold fast to His covenant like never before.
   - Our faith in God's faithfulness activates covenant promises in our lives. It is not enough to know that God was faithful to a group of peo-
ple thousands of years ago or that He will be faithful to a group of people in the future. We must know that God will be faithful to His covenant promises to us. Even though God may delay His answers to us, we must know and trust that God will come through on our behalf. We must know that as we live in covenant with God, He will be faithful.

- In Genesis 15:13-16, as God cut the covenant with Abraham, notice that God tells Abraham what is going to happen in the future when He fulfills the covenant. God tells Abraham that his descendents will be enslaved for four-hundred years, but that He will deliver them and bring them into the Promised Land. Hundreds of years later, as Israel was about to possess her inheritance, God spoke these words:

  For you are a holy people to the LORD your God; the LORD your God has chosen you to be a people for His own possession out of all the peoples who are on the face of the earth. The LORD did not set His love on you nor choose you because you were more in number than any of the peoples, for you were the fewest of all peoples, but because the LORD loved you and kept the oath which He swore to your forefathers, the LORD brought you out by a mighty hand and redeemed you from the house of slavery, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt. Know therefore that the LORD your God, He is God, the faithful God, who keeps His covenant and His lovingkindness to a thousandth generation with those who love Him and keep His commandments (Deut. 7:6-9).

- Notice the emphasized phrases. God was saying to the Hebrew nation that He was now taking them in to possess their inheritance, which had been promised by covenant to Abraham hundreds of years before. God was acting on their behalf because of a covenant oath. In this same passage, He instructs the people that they should know that He is a faithful God who can be trusted to keep His covenant promises. Why can He be trusted? God can be trusted because He is always faithful to His covenant.

- More than four hundred years had passed since God made a covenant promise to Abraham. Much had happened. Abraham had long since died. But God did not forget, He did not abandon his people or forsake them in Egyptian bondage. He remembered His covenant, delivered them from captivity by His mighty hand, brought them into the Promised Land, and fulfilled their destiny. God was faithful to His covenant thousands of years ago to the descendents of Abraham, and He will be faithful to His covenant to us today. God is always faithful to His covenant.

- As we just saw in Deuteronomy 7, we know that God will keep His covenant oaths because He is faithful and He acts in lovingkindness toward those in covenant with Him. As we look at the rich meaning of lovingkindness, we will get a glimpse of God's faithful heart toward us as we live with Him in covenant.

- God's 

  lovingkindness is the attribute in His heart that motivates Him
to act in faithfulness toward His covenant people.

- Lovingkindness is the attribute that forms the basis for our faith in God’s faithfulness. We can believe that God will fulfill His covenant promises to us because He is a God who shows lovingkindness to thousands of generations.
- The word translated “lovingkindness” is a very important word in the Scriptures, especially to the people of God. Moreover, lovingkindness is a word that is primarily directed toward God’s covenant people. It expresses God’s heart toward those who live in the reality of the New Covenant. This word does not describe the heart of God toward everyone in the world; instead, it is limited to those who have surrendered their lives in covenant to God.
- The Hebrew word that is most frequently translated as lovingkindness is checed (kheh'-sed). This word has different shades of meaning, each of which must be fully understood to comprehend this word. Lovingkindness connotes a legal obligation, an everlasting time frame, strength, steadfastness (which in itself means faithful, determined, fixed in placed, not subject to change), and love. All these meanings must be included to understand sufficiently this word and thus to understand God’s heart toward His covenant people.²
- Many people believe that checed should be translated “covenant faithfulness.”³
- The association of checed with covenant keeps it from being confused with God’s love for all of mankind. God loves the world; however, His checed applies primarily to His particular love for His chosen and covenanted people.⁴ An English word that conveys a similar meaning is the word “devotion.” God is devoted to those in covenant with Him.
- For example, marital love is often related to checed. Married couples are in covenant with each other and are devoted to one another. Marriage is a legal matter that requires faithfulness, but it also transcends legal issues, involving love, appreciation, desire, determination, and commitment.
- Checed defines how God has interacted throughout history with Israel specifically and with His covenant people in general. Checed is central to our understanding of God’s faithfulness to the New Covenant.
- The blessings of God are promised to us through covenant, and covenant is secured because of God’s everlasting faithfulness, strength, steadfastness, and love; that is, His lovingkindness—His checed.
- Several traits of God’s heart toward His covenant people emerge from a study of God’s lovingkindness. Each is an important aspect of understanding why God is so determined to fulfill His covenant promises in our lives.
• **God’s lovingkindness reveals His legal commitment toward His covenant people.**

  ▪ God has legally bound Himself to act in accordance with His covenant promises. When Jesus made the decision at Gethsemane to go to the cross, He made a covenant vow unto death. As Jesus carried His cross to the place where He would be crucified, He was taking the walk unto death for each of us. With His sacrificial death, Jesus secured the covenant by the shedding of His blood. By so doing, God chose to bind Himself legally to His unalterable word and to be faithful to the promised blessings of His covenant with man.
  ▪ God’s heart is to act faithfully on behalf of His covenant people because He has legally bound Himself to do so.

• **Lovingkindness reveals His strength toward His covenant people.**

  ▪ There is more to God’s faithful heart than just His legal responsibility to move on our behalf. God has the strength to fulfill His covenant promises. God is the omnipotent, all-powerful God. When the Hebrew people were delivered from Egyptian bondage at the Red Sea, they praised their covenant Partner, singing, “In Your lovingkindness You have led the people whom You have redeemed; in Your strength You have guided them to Your holy habitation” (Ex. 15:13).
  ▪ This verse illustrates the connection between the lovingkindness of God and His strength. We all know that God has unlimited strength. However, the good news is that out of His lovingkindness, God directs His unlimited strength toward His covenant partners. Whatever the need, God’s lovingkindness directs His strength to help you through the trials of life. There is no problem too great, no issue too difficult for the lovingkindness of your covenant Partner.

• **Lovingkindness expresses God’s steadfastness toward His covenant people.**

  ▪ Steadfast defines one who is firm and remains fixed in what he has said, done, or promised. A steadfast person will not be moved from his position. He is determined to see his word fulfilled because of loyalty and faithfulness.
  ▪ Because God always acts in lovingkindness, He is steadfast in His commitment to His covenant people. He is firm in His promises. He does not waver. He does not change His mind. He is the same yesterday, today, and forever. He is a God who can be trusted. He is a God who can be believed, relied on, and depended upon.
• **Lovingkindness reveals God's love toward His covenant people.**
  
  ▪ Love is the primary attribute that motivates God to act on our behalf and meet our needs.
  ▪ Sometimes it is difficult to understand how a holy God could care so much for sinful, weak human beings. But He does. He loves us, especially those who are in covenant with Him. He cherishes and desires us. He thinks that we are wonderful, lovely, and special.
  ▪ God’s love is hard for us to explain or describe. His love for us is strong, powerful, and overwhelming. Because of His sincere feelings of affection for His covenant partners, He is totally devoted to caring for us, meeting our needs, and helping us experience the fulfillment of His covenant promises.

• **Lovingkindness reveals His everlasting care toward His covenant people.**
  
  ▪ God’s lovingkindness is everlasting. It lasts forever. It never fails, changes, or ceases. God’s lovingkindness—His commitment, strength, steadfastness, and love—is directed toward His covenant people forever.
  ▪ God’s lovingkindness is offered to thousands. Deuteronomy 7:9 declares that His lovingkindness is given to a thousand generations, and Psalm 136 declares twenty-six times that God’s lovingkindness is everlasting. We can be greatly encouraged in knowing that God will not leave us as orphans. He will not forsake us. He will not fail us. He will be true to His word. His word will not come back void without accomplishing what He intended. No matter how long we have waited for the fulfillment of a promise.
  ▪ Because God demonstrates lovingkindness, He has chosen to bind Himself in faithfulness to His covenant partners. His strength tells us that He is able to meet every need. His steadfastness tells us that He is determined to come to our aid, never leaving us nor forsaking us as we call upon Him. And His love tells us that He is affectionately devoted to leading us onward to victory. His lovingkindness is everlasting!

3. **Recognize that there is often a delay between when the promise is given and when the promise is fulfilled.**

• Abraham is a great example of how long it sometimes takes for promises to be fulfilled. God had promised Abraham many great blessings—including a son and a piece of land. But it took about twenty-five years before Isaac was born and more than 400 years before they received their promised land.
• There was a delay between the promise and the fulfillment of the promise. As we see in the life of Abraham, he had to hold fast to the covenant while he waited.
• During this time of waiting, Abraham was blessed in many ways. But he did not have the ultimate blessing that God had promised to him—a child through which all the other blessings would come. The same is true with us.
• Though it is often difficult to wait for a promise to be fulfilled, the waiting period is important. It is during this time that God develops godly character in our lives.
• Living without the promise breaks our pride and produces true humility. During this time our trust in the Lord is perfected and our knowledge of God’s faithfulness is matured. While we wait, we learn to enjoy God and not just seek Him for His hand of provision.
• During this time of delay, however, we must learn to hold fast to God’s covenant promises. We grow in our faith by knowing that His Word is true, His promises are real, and His lovingkindness is directed toward us. We must hold fast to the covenant by knowing that God will do what He has said He would.

4. Develop a lifestyle of faith and patience that will enable us to inherit the promises.

• The author of Hebrews writes, “So that you will not be sluggish, but imitators of those who through faith and patience inherit the promises. For when God made the promise to Abraham, since He could swear by no one greater, He swore by Himself, saying, ‘I WILL SURELY BLESS YOU AND I WILL SURELY MULTIPLY YOU.’ And so, having patiently waited, he obtained the promise” (Heb 6:12-15).
• The challenge that Abraham faced and that we face as we wait for the promise to be fulfilled is to maintain our faith as we wait patiently for God’s perfect timing.
• During this time, we must keep our minds focused on God and the truth of His Word. We must choose to believe the promises of God rather than what we are experiencing.
• During his time of waiting, Abraham was far from perfect. He failed several times. He went to Egypt during a time of famine. While there, he told Pharaoh’s officials that his wife was his sister. He also tried to see the promise fulfilled through Hagar rather than Sarah.
• But he also had many successes. His faith was tested for years before the promise was fulfilled. And even after Isaac was born, Abraham was still required to offer him to the Lord.
• While Abraham was being tested, he had to keep his eyes on the Lord and patiently maintain his faith. God did not fulfill His word until Abraham was fully assured that what God had promised, He was also able to perform. Notice the following verse:

    In hope against hope he believed, so that he might become a father of many nations according to that which had been spoken, “SO SHALL YOUR DESCENDANTS BE.” Without becoming weak in faith he contemplated his own body, now as good as dead since he was about a hundred years old, and the deadness of Sarah’s womb; yet, with respect to the promise of God,
he did not waver in unbelief but grew strong in faith, giving glory to God, and being fully assured that what God had promised, He was able also to perform. Therefore, IT WAS ALSO CREDITED TO HIM AS RIGHTEOUSNESS (Rom. 4:18-22).

- God did not fulfill His promises until Abraham’s faith had been tested and he overcame the obstacles he faced by believing that God was faithful to His word.
- The same is true with us today. We will only inherit the promises of God by holding fast to the covenant in the face of difficult circumstances.

Since we are living in the challenging days preceding the Lord’s return, now is the time to learn how to hold fast to God’s covenant.

Notes

3. The Complete Word Study Bible and Reference CD, s.v. “covenant.”
Review Questions

True or False

1. To fully experience God’s promises, we must learn to hold fast to the covenant.
2. As we approach Christ’s return, His glory will fill the earth and as a result, life will become easier.
3. Goshen was a place of safety for God’s people when God sent plagues upon Egypt.
4. A day is coming when our pastor is the only one we can depend on.
5. Our heavenly Father has directed His lovingkindness specifically toward His covenant people.
6. The blessings of God are promised to us through covenant, and covenant is secured because of God’s lovingkindness.
7. There is rarely a delay between when the promise is given and when the promise is fulfilled.
8. We inherit God’s promises through faith and patience.
9. Abraham had to wait many years before he received any of God’s promised blessings to him.
10. As we approach the return of Jesus, the idea of covenant will become increasingly more important to us because it will be more than an interesting idea—it will be a lifeline.

Short Answers and Fill in the Blank

11. The promises of God are ours through ________________.
12. The Hebrew word for lovingkindness is ________________.
13. In many cases, we will only inherit the promises of God by ________________
    ________________ to the covenant in the face of difficult circumstances.
14. To hold fast to the covenant, we must develop a lifestyle of ________________ and
    ________________ that will enable us to inherit the promises.
15. Four characteristics of God’s lovingkindness are ____________,
________________, ________________, and ________________.

From the list on the right, identify five traits that best characterize God’s lovingkindness.

__ 16. __

Possible Matches for 16-20

__ 17. a. Reveals His legal commitment toward His people

__ 18. b. Explains why God’s promises are inherited through faith and patience

__ 19. c. Describes God’s checed

__ 20. d. Expresses God’s strength toward His covenant people

e. Depicts God’s steadfastness toward mankind

f. Reveals God’s love toward His covenant people

g. Is a word that defines God’s special devotion to those in covenant with Him

h. Focuses on God’s everlasting care toward His people

i. An important concept in understanding covenant