



Week 3

sunday 1 august

connect group resource

### How to use this resource

During this series each campus will be delivering different messages on Sundays around the theme of vision and the Breakthrough Offering on 1 August.

These notes will focus on aspects of our personal vision or dream for our life.

Each week there is a one page resource on the [church website](#) for individuals to use for their personal reflection or in discussion with family or friends.

We have been looking forward to our vision and dreams. Now we take time to look at the influence of the past to shape our future. I call it the power of looking backwards. In this series we've been looking forward as each campus plans to build a legacy for future generations. The belief that this can happen comes from looking back to where we started and how people overcame the storms which came along in each campus. We look at what God did through people who took the dream He gave and made it happen. Looking backwards at how we have changed and how we have grown powerfully builds our faith for even more of this in our lives and the lives of those in the Connect Group and for those in the church.

Here are three words and some of the definitions of these words.

- Story** a narration of the events in the life of a person; a report or account of a matter
- Testimony** the statement or declaration of a witness under oath or affirmation; evidence in support of a fact or statement; open declaration or profession
- History** a continuous, systematic narrative of past events as relating to a particular people, country, period, person; acts, ideas, or events that will or can shape the course of the future



### IN THE BIBLE

Consider the names of the two sections of the Bible: Old and New Testament. We are so used to the term we can forget the word testament means testimony. The Bible is the testimony of God's will and dream for people. Legally the word means this: *A written document providing for the disposition of a person's property after death; a will.* Hmmm, something to think about.

**Ask the group to share what thoughts** come to mind straightaway when they think of the Bible. **Then ask them to suggest** what non-believers think about when they hear the word Bible.

Let's look at one aspect of the power of looking backwards in respect to the Bible. Covenants. This is a word used in both Testaments and means: *the conditional promises made to humanity by God, as revealed in Scripture.* In legal terms it means: *an agreement, usually formal, between two or more persons to do or not do something specified.* A covenant can be an agreement between two parties so both have input to what is agreed or it can be a promise from one person to another with conditions and is made with no negotiation on how it was reached. God used the second way. This is common in life e.g. a parent promise a child a reward for doing something desirable or an employer promises a bonus if the worker achieves a goal. The Greek word *diatheke* is used interchangeably 15 times in the New Testament for "covenant" and "testament."

Take time to look at God’s main covenants and **share thoughts** about what they show us of God’s nature, what they promised and what they mean for us today:

The Edenic Covenant	<b>Genesis 1:28-30 &amp; 2:16-17</b> Man is charged with responsibility for propagating the race, subduing the earth, exercising dominion over the animals, caring for the garden in Eden, and refraining from eating of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil
The Adamic Covenant	See <b>Genesis 3</b> Consequences of man's fall necessitated a changed relationship between man and God
The Noahic Covenant	<b>Genesis 8:21-9:17</b> This unconditional covenant with Noah (which affects all mankind) establishes principles for all government
The Abrahamic Covenant	<b>Genesis 12:1-7; 13:14-17; 15:1-2; 22:15-18</b> An unconditional covenant. God gave Abraham the promise of a great nation plus other benefits like blessings
The Mosaic Covenant	<b>Exodus 19:3-6</b> A Conditional Covenant. Connected with the giving of the Law at Sinai, and the Levitical priesthood.
The Davidic Covenant	<b>2 Samuel 7:8-16; Isaiah 1:24-28; parts of Psalm 89</b> Features (1) a temple in Israel, (2) a kingdom in perpetuity, (3) a throne, i.e., royal authority in the line of David, and (4) chastisement on sons for their disobedience. The promise of Messiah in the line of David is confirmed.
The New Covenant	<b>Matthew 26:26-28; Jeremiah 31; Hebrews 8:8-13</b> An everlasting, unconditional covenant imparting a renewed mind and heart to the recipients. Restored favour and blessing for Israel. Complete and final forgiveness and removal of sins. Indwelling of the Holy Spirit.



## SPIRITUAL GROWTH

When we talk about history most people want to move on to something more interesting or positive. Many quotes are cynical or at best gloomy, like these ones:

*“Each time history repeats itself, the price goes up. “*

*“History is a vast early warning system.”*

*“We learn from history that we do not learn anything from history.”*

*“History repeats itself, has to, nobody listens.”*

*“Those who ignore history are bound (or doomed) to repeat it.”*

Laying aside the stereotypes of thinking and the warning to not live in the past (right as it is) there is truth in many of these quotes no matter who first said them. For example, it is an early warning system. Isn't that what the Bible is in its raw way it reveals the sin and mistakes of its greatest heroes? The whole of the story of Israel told in Samuel and Kings is one example after another that the next generation doesn't listen to the lesson of an earlier generation.

So what about you and me. Let's look at our personal history. **If your group is up to it go deep straight away with this question:** tell about a painful lesson from your own history which taught you something and which you don't want to repeat and you hope that others won't repeat. Not everyone will join in or you might not have enough time. The more recently you set the event the harder it will be to share (e.g. something in the past year is harder than anytime in your life). **Ask this follow-up question:** is there a warning in the Bible to avoid this painful lesson?

**Here is the point of this exercise:** these days we tend to avoid focusing upon the past and things that went wrong. This is true in almost all parts of society. We do this because we could be at risk of living in the past and letting it dictate our life. This can happen but it can also be avoided. So as a rule people don't talk about the mistakes we made in a constructive, positive and humble way therefore we deprive others who know us of the opportunity to learn. David never did this in the Bible. His emotions, successes, errors and everything in between are shared with us and have become a place of comfort and direction for millions of believers. We can grow by being like David and leave a legacy for the next generation following us.

**Now taking the other angle:** is there something from your history which has shaped your life in a positive and successful way? Even though the quotations and many people's attitudes are generally negative towards history there is a benefit of looking backwards. We see how far we have come. We see what God has achieved through us. We see what we could achieve in the future. Many things which worked in the past can work today to shape our spiritual growth. For example, discuss the lives of earlier 'saints' of the faith who have shown us a way to live and love God and love people. Go to a timeframe more recently and discuss people who have personally shaped our future in a positive way and how they shaped our spiritual growth. Is there someone (could be known personally or could be an author or speaker) currently in our life using their wisdom and experience to help us continue to grow?



## CARING & SHARING

**Ask the group to share some wise sayings or advice people have given them during their lifetime.** It might have come from a parent, a teacher, a coach, a grandparent, a leader, a friend or anyone. Consider how these people learnt this piece of advice. It may have been through personal experience or something which has been passed on to them.

**Now take time to ask everyone** to think of a piece of advice gained from their life when something wrong and a piece of advice gained from their life when something went great. This is the true power of looking backwards. It isn't about being full of regrets about mistakes in the past or wishing you could go back to that time rather than being alive now. It is about learning, growing and then sharing the lesson with others.

**Take a risk with this exercise of encouragement.** Ask for a volunteer and then ask the rest of the group to share something positive which they enjoy about the volunteer. They only need to share a sentence or two each. Maybe if there are quite a few people keep a brief note of what is said (you can give it to the volunteer later). Look for some common observations and ask the volunteer to tell the group how this became part of their character and personality. This might not be easy for each category of observations but it should be possible for most. Here is what you can expect: what most likely shaped their personality and character will be certain people and next most common will be some defining experiences and then it will be a teaching they read or heard.

Having demonstrated this you could break the group into fours and repeat it with someone different. You'll find it harder to get volunteers for the second round because we tend to avoid the spotlight and encouragement as we would rather someone else enjoyed it, *but secretly we all appreciate encouraging things being said to us*. If no one volunteers just pick people using a random method like next person to have a birthday.



## REACHING OTHERS

The power of looking backwards is also called the power of the testimony. Look at the definition on page one of a testimony – it is so rich with meaning when it comes to telling what Jesus has done in our life. We create life whenever we share about the change in our life after we were saved or when God worked through us to help someone else or we were blessed when He worked through someone else. Our testimony of something that happened in the past glorifies Jesus and reminds the hearer that good things happen to people. It also creates hope that good things can happen to them now or soon. The testimony becomes a witness of God and His nature.

**Ask the group to think of three positive stories** to tell about different aspects of their life after salvation. It is best that one should be recent, like the last few months. If all the stories are always from decades ago then they won't be as powerful as something like "last month this happened ...." Once the group has had time to think **ask them to share a story** with someone else in the group and ask for feedback.