

**Jer. 31:31–34**

*Ps. 51:1–12 or*

*Ps. 119:9–16*

*Heb. 5:5–10*

*John 12:20–33*

# Faithful Inside and Out

## **Goal for the Session**

*Tweens will learn about Jeremiah’s prophecy of the new covenant and reflect on how God empowers God’s people to live with integrity.*

## ■ P R E P A R I N G F O R T H E S E S S I O N

### Focus on Jeremiah 31:31–34

#### **WHAT is important to know?**

— From “Exegetical Perspective,” Jon L. Berquist

In the new covenant, God will place the divine law into the hearts of the people. God does state the founding principle of this new covenant: “I will be their God, and they shall be my people” (v. 33). This association of God and people, each belonging to the other, is a frequent theme of Jeremiah (24:7; 32:38), as well as of the prophet Ezekiel (Ezek. 11:20; 34:30; 37:23, 27). The relationship of belonging is the core element of the new covenant. This new covenant differs in form from earlier covenants in that it is written on the people’s hearts (31:33), rather than on tablets (cf. Exod. 34:1).

#### **WHERE is God in these words?**

— From “Theological Perspective,” Samuel K. Roberts

Jeremiah’s prophecy offers us as well a powerful vision of the faithful life. Invited now to live a moral life that combines interior and exterior life, the persons living in a community formed by the new covenant will know God in a new way, as the one who seeks constantly to reconcile with us and the one who speaks directly to the heart. Now members of the body of Christ embody a grace-filled living, suggestive of the same graciousness extended to humanity by God and embodied so dramatically in Jesus’ sacrificial living and dying. Ultimately, grace-filled living is pursued in gratitude to God.

#### **SO WHAT does this mean for our lives?**

— From “Pastoral Perspective,” Richard Floyd

Lent is a time for confession and penitence, for emptying ourselves so we are prepared for the good news of Easter. Jeremiah invites us to confess and repent boldly, because of the already-and-not-yet promise that God remembers our sins no more. Perhaps it also invites us to confess that the covenantal calculus, our quid-pro-quo approach to God, does not always hold. Now the shadow of the cross falls over everything—a reminder that, even for God’s most faithful one, there is no path around the darkness. Yet there lingers also the hope, the already-and-not-yet promise, that the days are surely coming when even the cross gives way to life.

#### **NOW WHAT is God’s word calling us to do?**

— From “Homiletical Perspective,” Woody Bartlett

“Will this new law on my heart not take away my freedom to live my own life the way I want to?” For those who have ever been in love, this is an absurd question. Having the law of love firmly engraved in one’s heart is an adventure in freedom. Having the love of God written on one’s heart is the essence of freedom. It is the freedom to be who one truly is, knowing that one’s true character is what is most pleasing to God and therefore reflects the best of what the law requires. All of this will be good news to needy, lonely, and anxious people.

**FOCUS SCRIPTURE**  
*Jeremiah 31:31–34*

## Focus on Your Teaching

Tweens prize integrity. They aren't fooled by discrepancies between word and deed. They are quick to sound the alarm on hypocrisy. According to the Josephson Institute of Ethics' 2012 *Report Card on American Youth*, high school students are "cheating, lying, and stealing less" for the first time in a decade—a trend that seems to reflect character formation accomplished during the tween years. Now is the time to affirm your learners' ideals of integrity. Acknowledge that everyone falls short at times, but also proclaim that God forgives and continues to empower God's people to live with integrity.

*God, make me a model of integrity for these tweens and open my heart and my mind to learn from them as I teach. Amen.*

### YOU WILL NEED

- purple cloth
- Christ candle, matches
- Bibles
- scissors
- Color Pack 1, 3, 6, 7, 28
- newsprint or markerboard
- markers
- copies of Resource Sheet 1
- Singing the Feast*, 2020–2021; CD player

### For Responding

- option 1: copies of Resource Sheet 2 on colored card stock, scissors, markers, tape, hole punch, yarn
- option 2: Bible
- option 3: copies of Resource Sheet 1; index cards; fine-tipped markers; quotation books or Internet-connected device (optional)

## LEADING THE SESSION

### GATHERING

*Before the session*, if your classroom Bibles are not all the same version, make a copy of Psalm 119:9–16 from one version for each learner. Make a copy of Resource Sheet 1 (Session Resources) for each learner and cut apart the sections. If you are using option 1 in Responding, make copies of Resource Sheet 2 (Covenant Heart) on two colors of card stock, one copy of each color for each learner.

Greet learners as they arrive. Ask volunteers to spread a purple cloth in the center of your meeting space and place the Christ candle and Color Pack 1 on it. Gather around the Christ candle. Form two groups to speak the words on Color Pack 1 as a volunteer lights the candle.

**Group 1: Jesus Christ is the Light of the World.**

**Group 2: Whoever follows Jesus has the light of life.**

Tell learners today is the fifth Sunday in Lent, a season for recommitting ourselves to living in God's ways. Distribute Bibles or copies of Psalm 119:9–16. Form two groups and have them read aloud the psalm, alternating verses between groups. Extinguish the candle.

Print the word *integrity* on newsprint or markerboard. Ask tweens to offer definitions of the word *integrity*, and record their responses. Invite learners to tell about times they've seen people act with integrity; in other words, doing what they said they would do.

Comment that today's Bible reading has something to say about integrity.

## EXPLORING

Display Color Pack 6. Ask learners to describe the thoughts or feelings this photo evokes for them. Suggest that this picture can serve as an image of the prophet Jeremiah. Tell learners Jeremiah is sometimes called “the weeping prophet.” Have them look at Color Pack 6 as you read aloud Jeremiah 8:18—9:3 and listen for the reasons Jeremiah weeps. After you read the passage, ask:

- ✧ How well do you think this photo connects with Jeremiah’s words?
- ✧ Why did Jeremiah weep for his people? (Because they were suffering; because they had broken God’s law.)
- ✧ When have you, like Jeremiah, felt like weeping because of people’s suffering?
- ✧ When have you, like Jeremiah, felt like weeping because of people’s wrongdoing?

Distribute the “Jeremiah” section of Resource Sheet 1 (Session Resources). Explain that Jeremiah preached in the decades before the mighty Babylonian Empire conquered the small kingdom of Judah and destroyed the city of Jerusalem. Many of the people were taken by force to live in Babylon. Many of these people wondered if this defeat meant God had been defeated. They wondered whether God was still with God’s people. Jeremiah interpreted this time of exile in Babylon as God’s punishment for the ways the nation of Judah had failed to obey God’s Law. Display Color Pack 3 as a reminder of this law.

Scripture includes many descriptions of the covenant between God and God’s people as marriage. This is intended to be a positive image, but some learners may not have positive impressions of or associations with marriage. Encourage these learners to think of additional images of love and support with which to compare God’s relationship with God’s people.

Explain that the concept of *covenant* is a solemn promise or a binding agreement. Display Color Pack 7. Discuss:

- ✧ In what ways is marriage a covenant? (Promise of mutual love, faithfulness, lifelong support.)

Distribute Bibles and ask tweens to turn to Jeremiah 31:31–34. Ask a volunteer to read it aloud. Discuss:

- ✧ How would you describe the mood of these verses?
- ✧ In verse 31, what does God promise to do? Why?
- ✧ In verse 32, why do you think Jeremiah describes God as Israel’s husband?
- ✧ How will God’s law in this new covenant be different than God’s law in the covenant made after the exodus from Egypt?
- ✧ How will God’s new covenant transform the people?
- ✧ How do you imagine the people living in exile in Babylon responded to Jeremiah’s prophecy?

Refer to the definitions of *integrity* recorded in Gathering. Ask learners to discuss how well these definitions might describe God’s people living in the new covenant. Ask:

- ✧ How might the promise of God’s new covenant help us to live with integrity? (Expect responses such as: God will help us to act like God’s people and forgive us when we fall short; God will help us know what to do.)

Tweens who have Jewish friends may wonder whether Jeremiah’s talk of the broken covenant means God has rejected Jews. Reassure them that Jeremiah’s message is one of renewed hope and possibility for *all* people (Jeremiah 31:34).



Don't compel any learner to give a response. It's fine for the group to sit quietly and reflect on the question. However, if you model a willingness to talk honestly in response to questions, learners may be more willing to follow suit.

## RESPONDING

Mark the activities you will use:

- 1. Covenant Hearts** Learners will create visual reminders of God's promise to write God's law on their hearts. Distribute copies of Resource Sheet 2 (Covenant Heart), scissors, and markers. Work with learners to follow the directions there. Point out that the interwoven strips of the "tablets" resemble a cross, reminding us of how Jesus fulfills God's promise of the new covenant.
- 2. Meditation of the Heart** Offer learners time to nourish the direct knowledge of God promised in Jeremiah's prophecy by practicing *lectio divina* ("holy" or "spiritual" reading). Ask three volunteers to read aloud Jeremiah 31:31–34, one at a time. After the first reading, ask learners: "What word, phrase, or image most attracts you?" and pause to invite responses. After the second reading and a brief silence, ask: "Where do you see yourself in these verses?" and pause for responses. After the third reading and a brief silence, ask: "Through these verses, what is God calling you to do?" and invite learners to respond. Encourage them to follow through on what they have heard in their hearts.
- 3. Speaking of Integrity** Learners will engage various cultural perspectives on the subject of integrity with the promise of God's new covenant. Distribute copies of the "Speaking of Integrity" section of Resource Sheet 1 (Session Resources). Read the quotations aloud and discuss them with learners—what do they have in common? Ask learners to choose the quotation that interests them most. Invite them to tell what they like and/or dislike about that perspective on integrity. Option: Invite learners to find additional quotations about integrity in a book of quotations or at Web sites such as: [www.quotegarden.com](http://www.quotegarden.com) or [www.thinkexist.com](http://www.thinkexist.com). Distribute index cards and fine-tipped markers. Form pairs and have each pair write a brief "quotable" statement about living with integrity as God's people. Have learners post these quotations around the church building for others to see.

### Behold, I Am with You

Behold, I am with you,  
 (*Behold, I am with you*)  
 And will keep you wherever  
 you go, (*And will keep  
 you wherever you go*)  
 And will keep you wherever  
 you go. (*And will keep  
 you wherever you go*)

Behold, I am with you,  
 (*Behold, I am with you*)  
 And will keep you wherever  
 you go, (*And will keep  
 you wherever you go*)  
 And will keep you wherever  
 you go. (*And will keep  
 you wherever you go*)

## CLOSING

Gather learners around the Christ candle and light it. Place Color Pack 7 next to the candle. Read aloud Jeremiah 31:33–34. Discuss:

- ✎ How might the promise of God's new covenant be good news for this young man? For his community?

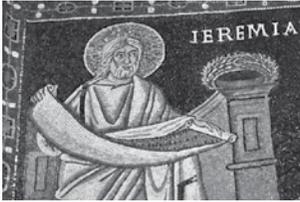
Pray aloud, asking tweens to repeat each phrase:

*Gracious God, / be with us during this season of Lent. / Comfort us with your presence / as you lead us on our journey of faith. / In Jesus' name. Amen.*

Form two groups to sing "Behold, I Am with You" (Color Pack 28; track 2 on *Singing the Feast, 2020–2021*), with one group singing the first part of the line and the second group being the echo. Then invite learners to exchange handshakes, high fives, or fist bumps with one another as they say: "Go with God."

## Session Resources

### Jeremiah



- When Jeremiah was a boy, God called him to be a prophet.
  - Jeremiah prophesied from 627 to 587 B.C.E.
  - His name means “The Lord lifts up.”
  - Jeremiah is sometimes called “the weeping prophet.”
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### Speaking of Integrity

People acquire a particular quality by constantly acting in a particular way.  
—attributed to Aristotle, ancient Greek philosopher

*“I am not an angel,”  
I asserted; “and I  
will not be one till I  
die: I will be myself.”*  
—Jane in *Jane Eyre*,  
by Charlotte Brontë, 1847

*The first thing is to be  
honest with yourself. You  
can never have an impact  
on society if you have not  
changed yourself.*  
—Nelson Mandela

*Keep true, never be  
ashamed of doing right;  
decide on what you think  
is right and stick to it.*  
—George Eliot (pen name of Mary Ann Evans),  
19th century British novelist

I am different from [George] Washington; I have a higher, grander standard of principle. Washington could not lie. I can lie, but I won't.  
—Mark Twain, 19th-century American author and humorist

March 21, 2021  
Faithful Inside and Out

Tweens  
Resource Sheet 2

## Covenant Heart

### Directions:

1. Cut out the two pieces.
2. Cut along the vertical lines on each piece.
3. At the curved edge of one piece, write "God will be our God."
4. At the curved edge of the other piece, write "We will be God's people."
5. "Weave" the strips at the bottoms of the two tablets to form a heart, as shown in the picture.
6. Secure loose ends with small pieces of tape.
7. Punch a hole in the center of the heart, near the top. Tie on a piece of yarn for hanging.
8. Hang your heart in a place to remind family members of God's promise to be your God and to write God's law on your hearts.

