



A Framework
for Discipleship in
the Church

HEIRS OF THE **COVENANT**

cdm
DISCIPLESHIP MINISTRIES

BY SUSAN HUNT
with Stephen Estock and Karen Hodge



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Although many publishers do not capitalize terms, and particularly pronouns which refer to the Trinity, CDM publications has capitalized those elements for reverence and clarity of reference. Likewise, Church is capitalized when referring to the universal Church from eternity past to eternity future but is not capitalized when referring to a local congregation or a denomination.

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DISCIPLESHIP IS A GROUP PROJECT

HOW TO USE THIS STUDY

We are delighted you have picked up *Heirs of the Covenant*. This book has been a collaborative process between our primary author, Susan, and ministry practitioners, Stephen and Karen. Discipleship is always a group project, so we pray that you will read this book and seek to implement its truths in the context of community.

CONTEXTS

- **Classroom/Small Group:** Consider using this book to train seminary students or church leadership—elders, Sunday school teachers, or ministry teams.
- **Kitchen Table:** Consider using this book in family devotions to equip your family.
- **Individual Use:** Consider using this book devotionally.

COVENANT CONVERSATIONS

Each chapter concludes with a section to encourage cultivating an intergenerational discipleship culture within churches and homes. This section includes:

- **Reflections for Church Leaders** with a short application and focused discussion questions,
- **Reflections for Individuals and Families** with a short application and focused discussion questions, and
- **General Discussion Questions** to summarize the application of the chapter.

Feel free to use any or all the questions. If you are reading the book with others, consider having participants circle or highlight the questions they would like to address the next time you gather.

BRINGING IT HOME

What you hold in your hands is a primer on Covenant theology. We pray your study will be the beginning of covenant conversations and implementation. To whet your appetite, we have included ministry appendices (see pgs. 199–227) to share how these covenant truths have been applied across a variety of ministries and to inspire ways to apply them in your church. We believe these truths hold the potential to transform lives, homes, and churches.

CONNECT TO PEOPLE AND RESOURCES

Check out the *Heirs of the Covenant* Hub: www.pcacdm.org/heirs

- **Connect with People.** Our CDM Team, comprised of seasoned ministry practitioners, would be delighted to help you implement these concepts.
- **Connect to Resources.** We have provided additional tools and suggested resources.

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CHAPTER 1

FOR CHRIST'S CROWN AND COVENANT

A line of Christian preachers and teachers left a rich legacy in Scotland.

Young Patrick Hamilton was a gifted student. In pursuit of his studies, he traveled to the University of Wittenberg where he studied under Martin Luther and Philip Melanthon, leaders in the new Reformation movement. He returned to Scotland and began teaching God's Word. In 1527, at age twenty-four, he was burned at the stake. He was the first martyr in Scotland for the cause of the Reformation, but he was not the last.

Following Hamilton's death, many Protestant leaders took refuge abroad. In 1544, when the persecution of Protestants was raging, George Wishart returned to his homeland and resumed his preaching and teaching. Two years later he was burned at the stake. When Wishart was arrested, one of his students insisted on remaining with him. Wishart sent him away with the words, "Return . . . and God bless you. One is sufficient for a sacrifice." That student was John Knox who became, in the words inscribed on a monument to his memory in Glasgow, "the chief instrument, under God, of the Reformation of Scotland."

Knox said, "Seeing that God has determined that His Church here on earth shall be taught not by angels but by men, it is necessary to be most careful for the virtuous education and godly upbringing of the youth of this realm."¹ His leadership in establishing schools and his

¹ John Howie, *The Scotts Worthies*, rev. W. H. Carslaw (The Banner of Truth Trust, 1870, reprinted 1995), 11-12.

fiery, uncompromising preaching prepared a people to live uncompromisingly through political and ecclesiastical turmoil.

In February 1638, the National Covenant was drafted. Thousands signed this document that rejected the Divine Right of Kings in favor of man's duty to God. The persecution of the covenanters became so intense that the 1680s are known as the Killing Time.

What drove these people? What evoked such radical obedience? The banner of the covenanters says it all: For Christ's Crown and Covenant.

The King of Glory entered into a covenant to save His people. His crown rights over them and His covenant love for them are worthy of uncompromising allegiance.



HEIRS OF THE COVENANT STORIES

And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise.

— GALATIANS 3:29

STEPHEN'S STORY

STEPHEN ESTOCK IS THE COORDINATOR OF CDM

“The beauty of salvation grows brighter; I now read God’s Word with new eyes.”

The words vary, but I hear this message often. When believers understand the fullness of God’s covenant, life and ministry grow richer. That was my experience. When my seminary professors helped me see God’s story of redemption unfolded through His covenant love, my heart rejoiced in new ways. I saw God’s Word—and my life and ministry in the church—through new lenses colored by His covenant promises. In the years following, I taught Covenant theology but feared my lessons were too academic. Then someone directed me to *Heirs of the Covenant* where I saw the nurturing, relational, practical dimension that had eluded me.

Fast forward to September 2024. CDM launched the multi-generational “Made for More” conferences. Women and girls gathered to understand their identity in Christ and their role in God’s great story of redemption. In the opening presentation, Paula Miles explained

the beauty of God's covenant as she had learned it from Susan Hunt. As I listened, I saw generations of women, including my mother, my wife, and my daughter. I saw Susan listening to her spiritual daughter explain the theological and practical beauty of God's covenant. It dawned on me: What a glorious picture! We need to ensure this testimony of God's covenant love continues from generation to generation. After the session, I found Susan.

Heirs of the Covenant is thirty years old. Though the Bible-centered theology is timeless, the context of church ministry has changed. I asked Susan to help CDM update the book to give fresh insights into how Covenant theology shapes the discipleship ministry of the local church. She agreed, as long as Karen Hodge and I would help her.

This revised version is a multi-faceted, holistic framework of discipleship ministry that equips all ages to think biblically and live covenantally. As Karen Hodge observed, "This book encapsulates a philosophy of discipleship that is Word-based and relationally driven." Through the theological content, practical application, illustrative stories, and discussion questions, we hope ordained and lay leaders see with new eyes how Covenant theology enriches the spiritual life of the Body of Christ.

KAREN'S STORY

KAREN HODGE IS THE WOMEN'S MINISTRY COORDINATOR FOR CDM

The first time I read *Heirs of the Covenant* I was a twenty-nine-year-old wife of a scratch church planter with two kids four and under wrapped around my ankles. I was desperately trying to make sense of the Big Story God was writing in our family's life and ministry. Most days, I was stumbling forward through the mundane tasks of the day, yearning for majestic moments. My relationship with Susan was birthed out of a desperate need to help the women of our new church. The reality was that I was the one who needed the help.

Susan patiently discipled me in the covenantal framework you hold in your hands, and it reframed my perspective. She lifted my eyes to Scripture's scope of the whole and she listened as I began to see how the consent of the parts of the Bible could make sense of the little parts of our lives. I look back now with gratefulness and see how reading the first edition and then seeing the truths on its pages embodied in her life have impacted the trajectory of my family's life and ministry. The foundational principles you will encounter in this book have also framed my work in women's ministry both in the local church and for the Presbyterian Church in America (PCA). I pray this new edition will also significantly impact your family's life and ministry.

SUSAN'S STORY

SUSAN HUNT IS A FORMER WOMEN'S MINISTRY COORDINATOR FOR CDM

I grew up in a mainline Presbyterian church. I was very religious but did not know Jesus as my Savior. I assumed I would get to heaven because I was a good church girl. After graduating from college, I got my dream job working for the United States senator from our state. I had it all, but I was miserable. The darkness in my soul was overwhelming, so I did something radically religious. I went to seminary to get a degree in Christian education, not because I wanted to, but because I was desperate. In a Bible class I met Jesus, and then I met Gene Hunt. I graduated, we married, had a baby; then he graduated, and in 1965, we were off to our first church. It was eight years before the Presbyterian Church in America was born. We loved our little church, but we were in a denomination where we did not belong.

I was passionate about teaching children because I did not want any child to grow up in church and not hear they needed a Savior. Gene was equally passionate, but his story was different:

I was not born into a Christian family. I don't remember my parents ever taking me to church. The doctrine of God's sovereign election has never been a problem for me. I am a living illustration of this wonder.

When my dad died, we moved to my mother's hometown. In God's providence we moved to a neighborhood where there was a Presbyterian church willing to reach out to a young boy whose life could have gone in any direction. Sonny was my boyhood friend. His mother was the organist, so when the church doors opened, she was there. Sonny had no evangelistic fervor, and I had no consuming desire to know about God. Sonny didn't want to go to church alone, so he would drag me along.

I spent a lot of time at church. I remember the warmth and love of a church family. The church kids were my best friends. Many of their parents were our youth leaders. They opened their hearts and homes to me and showed me what Christian families look like. I was enfolded into this community. It never occurred to me that I was an outsider.

Gradually, I saw my need for a Savior and committed my life to Jesus. When I began to think I was being called to the gospel ministry, my church family rejoiced with me. I'm grateful they never resented the boy who tagged along with one of their own and who had no resources to contribute to the church. They invested in me because that's the covenant way.

I'm thankful our children and grandchildren have very different childhood memories, but I do not regret my past. "The lines have fallen for me in pleasant places; indeed, I have a beautiful inheritance" (Ps. 16:6).

Gene and I both wanted to "tell to the coming generation the glorious deeds of the LORD, and His might, and the wonders that He has done" (Ps. 78:4), not because of our theology but because of our experiences. We knew little about Covenant theology.

In 1973, Gene was one of the founders of the Presbyterian Church in America. Finally, we were in a denomination where we belonged, a denomination that was “true to the Bible and the Reformed Faith, and obedient to the Great Commission of Jesus Christ.” A few years later, our seminary friend, Charles Dunahoo, became coordinator of what is now the PCA’s Committee on Discipleship Ministries (CDM). The PCA and the Orthodox Presbyterian Church were in a joint venture, Great Commission Publications (GCP), with an ambitious goal to produce biblically sound Sunday school curriculum for pre-school to 12th grade. Charles asked me to join his staff and help write the pre-school material.

I will never forget my first meeting with the GCP staff. I did not know what I did not know. Allen Curry, Director of Curriculum, said, “Everything must be written from a covenantal perspective.” My response was, “I don’t know what that means.” I am forever grateful they didn’t close the meeting with prayer and send me on my way. They gave me books and position papers to read. They discipled me. For months I wrote lessons, and Allen would respond, “You are still moralizing. Help the children see Jesus in every story.”

As Gene and I understood more about the covenant, it radically changed how we thought about the world, the church, life, and ministry. It shaped us. A few years later when Charles asked me to serve as Coordinator of Women’s Ministry, the covenant shaped not only how I taught women, but also our philosophy of womanhood and of a women’s ministry in the church.

Gene lived covenantally before he thought covenantally. When we began to learn Covenant theology, it rang true to me because I had watched him live it, but I am confident that if our living had not become an overflow of our theology, we would not have gone the distance. Our experiences and passion would have worn thin.

In 1988, Dr. Edmund Clowney wrote *The Unfolding Mystery: Discovering Christ in the Old Testament*. Dr. J. I. Packer wrote in his foreword:

The importance of this theme—the OT pointing to Christ—is great, although for half a century Bible teachers . . . have not made much of it. . . . For this reason, Dr. Clowney’s admirable treatment of it should be greatly valued . . . Expect your heart to be stirred, as well as your head cleared, as you read.²

This was riveting for Gene and me because we grew up in church and went to seminary during the half century when Bible teachers, including pastors, did not make much of the unfolding mystery of God’s covenant. May we never cease to make much of the covenant! Gene finished strong and is now in glory. I miss him, but I live in the hope of the covenant promise.

Heirs of the Covenant was first published in 1998. In the dedication I wrote: “My husband, Gene, teaches me the content of the covenant in the context of covenant love. This book is as much his as it is mine.”

I’m eighty-five, so I was shocked when Stephen Estock, the current coordinator of CDM, asked me to update the book. When I re-read it, I realized many ideas were there in seed form that have matured and expanded over the last thirty years. As the revisions for this book developed, I gradually saw the underlying difference between the original version and this one. Thirty years ago, I was totally involved in “doing” ministry in our local church and as I served with the PCA’s Women’s Ministry. I was in the middle of the story God was writing in our lives, and I wrote from the perspective of on-the-ground experience. I think the original version has a programmatic undercurrent which probably makes it more practical. Now, I’m near the end of my story, and this changes my perspective. A grandchild asked me what I would change if I could go back and live my life again. My response: “Nothing! God used everything, the suffering and the rejoicing, for His glory which is

² Edmund P. Clowney, *The Unfolding Mystery: Discovering Christ in the Old Testament* (P&R Publishing, 1988), 7-8.

my good. He was always with me even when I doubted Him. It was all good because He is good.”

One of God’s immeasurably-more-than-I-could-imagine blessings is that I live between my two daughters. One of them lives in the home my mother built when, at age eighty, she moved here so she could be involved in the lives of her grandchildren and great-grandchildren. She lived to be ninety-nine, so they have sweet memories of Grandma Mac. When grandchildren and great-grandchildren visit me, we often look at the framed pictures of my parents, grandparents, and me as a child. We look at family “treasures”—the vase given to my grandparents on their 50th anniversary, Mama’s collection of cameos, one of which was given to her by her great-grandmother. We calculate the age of these things because I want them to think generationally. I tell them about my great-grandmother who prayed for the generations to come, and I emphasize she prayed for *them*. I want them to be rooted in their family stories. Whether you are eighty-five or twenty-five, you may be thinking, “But I don’t have a story like that.” Here’s the point: If you belong to Jesus, you do. You belong to the Family of families with a rich heritage, rooted in eternity past, that is to be experienced and enjoyed in your church family. I pray this book will encourage and equip you to cultivate intergenerational relationships that will help you to be rooted and grounded in love (see Eph. 3:14-21).

I pray with the psalmist:

So even to old age and gray hairs, O God, do not forsake me,
until I proclaim your might to another generation, your
power to all those to come. . . .

I will sing praises to you with the lyre, O Holy One of Israel.
My lips will shout for joy, when I sing praises to you
(Ps. 71:18, 22b-23a).

The old psalmist was not worried about projects and deadlines (which are important) but wanted to tell the younger generation about the Holy One of Israel. Me too. Now it's more important to me to write about *why* we do what we do rather than *how* to do it. However, I am awash with gratitude for Stephen, Karen, the storytellers who wrote their stories for each chapter, and the ministry leaders who wrote ideas in the appendix for providing the practical dimension for this revised version. That's the vitality of intergenerational covenant community.

OVERVIEW OF HEIRS OF THE COVENANT

If you have read anything else I (Susan) have written, this book will feel familiar because the framework for every book is the

same—understanding a covenantal perspective of Scripture—and then each book applies this perspective to specific relationships and ministries.

I'm grateful for the theologians who have written about the *content* of Covenant theology, but this book is about the day-by-day, week-by-week, generation-by-generation privileges and responsibilities of living in covenant with God and with His people. This book considers how the *content* of the covenant is lived out in the *context* of the covenant

community, and how it *culminates* in transformed lives that are passionate to glorify and enjoy God by making disciples who also glorify and enjoy Him.

A covenantal framework is Word-based and relationally driven, so it disciplines God's people to think biblically and live covenantally. It answers the questions:

This book considers how the content of the covenant is lived out in the context of the covenant community, and how it culminates in transformed lives that are passionate to glorify and enjoy God by making disciples who also glorify and enjoy Him.

- Why does a church need age and gender-specific ministries, or a music or missions ministry, fellowship dinners, or any other ministry?
- What are the biblical foundations for these ministries?
- How do these ministries relate to the pulpit ministry?
- How do they relate to one another?

Without answering these questions, the ministries in a church are often personality or event driven. They may be good and needed ministries, but if they are siloed, there is probably little communication/support/oversight of the pastor and elders, no unifying purpose or plan, no coordinated content or structure, making them vulnerable to individualism and competition. A covenantal framework cultivates an intergenerational culture of discipleship.

WHAT IS DISCIPLESHIP?

Throughout the Old Testament God commanded His people that “One generation shall commend your works to another and shall declare your mighty acts” (Ps. 145:4).³

Then in the New Testament the risen Christ commissioned His Church:

“All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age” (Matt. 28:18-20).

³ Throughout the book, pronouns referring to the Deity are capitalized for clarity except when using a quotation from the ESV (or other translation) or published text. In those cases, the capitalization of the Bible translation or published text is retained.

Countless pages and methods have been written about discipleship, but I think Paul gives a beautiful summary of what God's Word teaches. This seems to describe how Jesus discipled the apostles and how they discipled the developing church:

We were gentle among you, like a nursing mother taking care of her own children. So, being affectionately desirous of you, we were ready to share with you not only the gospel of God but also our own selves, because you had become very dear to us (1 Thess. 2:7-8).

Discipleship is informational. It is Word-based; it is sharing the gospel.

Discipleship is relational. It is relationally driven, like a nurturing mother who shares her very life with her children.

Discipleship is transformational. As Paul discipled them, they *became* very dear to him. We do not know whether they were dear or dreadful people, but as Paul shared his life and the gospel with them, his heart was transformed. The Holy Spirit produced His fruit of love in Paul's heart, a love that was not dependent on them but on God.

Discipleship is about all of life all the time. It begins with the sound preaching of God's Word. Paul told Titus to "teach what accords with sound doctrine" and then he gave instructions for older men and women to disciple the younger generations "so that in everything they may adorn the doctrine of God our Savior" (Titus 2:1, 10). In everything and everywhere we are to "wear" the gospel—at home, school, in our neighborhood, in our vocation, and on vacation. Discipleship is about using God's outward means of grace—the Word, worship, prayer, sacraments, fellowship—to cultivate an intergenerational discipleship culture where all ages and stages flourish and multiply.

WHAT IS COVENANT THEOLOGY?

On the sixth day of creation “God said, ‘Let us make man in our own image, after our likeness.’ . . . So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them” (Gen. 1:26, 27).

But how would the God of Glory relate to His male and female creatures? *The Westminster Confession of Faith* (WCF) answers this question:

The distance between God and the creature is so great, that although reasonable creatures do owe obedience unto him as their Creator, yet they could never have any fruition of him as their blessedness and reward, but by some voluntary condescension on God’s part, which he hath been pleased to express by way of covenant.⁴

We could never build a tower high enough to reach God. Check Genesis 11 to see what happens when we say, “Let us make . . . Let us build ourselves a tower.” Self-effort leads to confusion and chaos. God had to come to us. Covenant is the way God comes near to redeem and be with His people.

The Bible is one story which unfolds through a series of inter-related covenants that show the continuity of the whole Bible, giving us a redemptive, historical perspective of the Bible and of life and ministry. The covenant is not just academic; it is intensely personal

The Bible is one story which unfolds through a series of interrelated covenants that show the continuity of the whole Bible, giving us a redemptive, historical perspective of the Bible and of life and ministry.

⁴ *Westminster Confession of Faith with Proof Texts*. (Committee on Discipleship Ministries, 2005), 7.1.