

Covenant Discipleship Parents' Handbook

The Handbook for a new sort
of Communicant's Class

Helping Students Understand Faith, Theology,
and the Church

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Dedicated to our covenant families:

Burguets:

Anne, Iain, Elizabeth, Suzanna, Mary Claire, Katie, John, Johnathan,
and Mackenzie.

Eubanks's:

Marcie, Jack, Molly, Abbey, and Caroline.

Thank you for your constant love and support.

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Introduction—Welcome!

So, you're the parent of a Communicant's Class member! That's a very exciting position to be in—and it's also a very important position. In the Presbyterian Church in America (PCA), we take your part in this process very seriously, and we hope that you do, too.

You may be in one of a variety of different stages of church membership: you may be a long-time member of the Church, and your child is a “covenant” child; you may be fairly new to the church, but still a member; you may be entering a new members' class even now; or you may not be a member of the church, but your child wants to be. Any of these stages is fine, but we'll make two assumptions throughout this book—that you are a professing Christian, and that you are (or soon will be) a church member. If either of these is not true, please talk to your Pastor about your circumstances, and how the process might be amended to accommodate them.

A few words about the class...

There are a lot of questions that come with the possibility of taking your child through a Communicant's Class. Why is this process important—can't he/she simply join the church? Does my child need to be a certain age? What will he/she learn through this class or material? What role do I play in this process?

To be sure, the only requirement that we can biblically make of any person is that they be able to give a credible profession of faith, or as the PCA's *Book of Church Order* puts it: they must have “a profession of faith in Christ, have been baptized, and have been admitted by the Session to the Lord's Table.” But beyond that, many believe that it is important that a child who wishes to join the church should understand the commitment that they are making, and the nature of the institution to which they are making that commitment. With that in mind, we have designed this curriculum for a three-fold purpose:

1. To give certainty to the profession of faith that the child might make and solid understanding of the faith they profess;
2. To educate the child about the church and its ministry, basic theology, leadership, and role in their lives; and
3. To provide an opportunity for parents to interact with their children about these important aspects of life.

Therefore, it is our belief that, within reason, there should be no age limit or requirement for church membership, nor for participation in a Communicant's Class. We feel that any child that can understand the Gospel and make a profession of saving faith in Jesus Christ can also understand the important aspects of the church that they will be learning through this material.

That is where you come in—your role is the most significant part of the whole process. As a parent, ministry to your child begins with you; you, not the local church, are primarily responsible for the direct spiritual oversight and education of your children. The local church community takes only a distant second place in this role. This means that you bear most of the burden not only for raising your child, but also for nurturing their faith and encouraging spiritual growth. Many churches have youth ministry or children's ministry programs and staff, but these exist to complement your nurturing, and to offer a support system and resource center for you—not as a replacement of your obligation and duty.

Because of this, we have chosen the name “Covenant Discipleship” for this Communicants' Class curriculum. Through the family covenant, you are raising your child or children as disciples to be a part of the church, and this class is just one step in that process.

How it will work...

This material is designed to be used as a nine-lesson class; however, you may feel the need to take a different pace with the curriculum, be it faster or slower—this is one of the very reasons it is designed the way it is. The first six lessons will be done at your own pace at home—we encourage you to be as involved in the process as you can (just don't give them the

answers!). These lessons can be broken down into three categories, with two lessons for each: Faith, Theology, and Church.

Here is the basic schedule of the nine-lesson Covenant Discipleship Class:	
Lesson 1	Faith and Its Foundations: What is Faith and Why Have It?
Lesson 2	Understanding Your Faith: Up Close and Personal
Lesson 3	Basic Training: a Look at the Basics of What We Believe
Lesson 4	Why Do We Baptize Babies? And Other Good Questions...
Lesson 5	The Church: Isn't It Just a Building?
Lesson 6	Getting Down to Business: the Organization of the Church
Lesson 7	Faith and You: Review of Lessons 1 & 2
Lesson 8	What Presbyterians Believe: Review of Lessons 3 & 4
Lesson 9	We Are the Church Together: Review of Lessons 5 & 6

The last three lessons will be done in a classroom setting, perhaps during the Sunday School hour or in a small-group style context. These lessons will be taught by a Pastor or Ruling Elder, and will be a review of the material done in each of the three categories. While you are not required to attend these classes, you are welcome to do so.

This book is the parents' edition of the workbook your child has been given. It doesn't have the answers per-se, but it will give you a guide of what your child should understand at the end of each week. A copy of all of the material that your child's workbook contains is included in this book; your guide will be inset in boxes, and in a different style of type. The material is broken down into five sections per lesson, plus a summary, so that you could (for example) do one section each weekday and review over the

weekend; if you prefer to do it all in one sitting, it will probably take close to two hours.

Also, there are additional resources recommended for some of the more difficult material; a list of these has been provided to your church with the suggestion that they obtain copies to make them available for your use. You will want to have a copy of the *Westminster Confession of Faith* and the *Westminster Shorter Catechism* available; these documents are the core of our denomination's statements of belief, and we will refer to them frequently through this book. Speak with your Pastor or Elder to find out what else is available to you.

This will be an exciting time for you, and it is our prayer and hope that it furthers or develops opportunities for you to interact with your child!

Lesson 1: Faith and Its Foundation

What Is Faith, and Why Have It?

In the first lesson, we'll look at what faith is, and how it is developed. We'll also look at the "foundations" of faith—what makes a person's faith believable and strong. And we'll talk about the Bible, and begin to look at how God relates to man.

Psalm 127

A SONG OF ASCENTS, OF SOLOMON.

*¹Unless the LORD builds the house,
They labor in vain who build it;
Unless the LORD guards the city,
The watchman keeps awake in vain.*

*²It is vain for you to rise up early,
To retire late,*

*To eat the bread of painful labors;
For He gives to His beloved even in his sleep.*

*³Behold, children are a gift of the LORD,
The fruit of the womb is a reward.*

*⁴Like arrows in the hand of a warrior,
So are the children of one's youth.*

*⁵How blessed is the man whose quiver is full of them;
They will not be ashamed
When they speak with their enemies in the gate.*

Section 1: What is this faith stuff?

So, What is faith? In the Bible, Hebrews chapter 11, verse 1 tells us. Look that up, and copy it here:

What is faith?

In this section we simply want to reinforce the students' understanding of what faith is, and the need for it. You should go over this material carefully with them, because their understanding of this will influence how they approach the rest of the material. You may also want to go to the Westminster Shorter Catechism question # 86 for additional study. If you do not have a copy of the Westminster Confession of Faith and the Shorter Catechism, or would like additional materials on studying the Catechism with your family see The Pastor or an Elder.

Now, what does this mean? Re-write this verse in words that describe faith as it applies to you. You might want to discuss it with your parents before you're finished.

Parents, this is a good opportunity to interact with your students about what faith is. Two points of emphasis stand out here:

1. Faith is not something you do, but something you believe.
2. Faith always has an object, and what the object of someone's faith is will be just as important as whether they have faith.

That same chapter of Hebrews discusses a lot of people who are called "heroes of the faith" in the Bible. How did these people show their faith, and why was it important for them? Discuss some of them with your parents, and write down what you discuss.

Abel (Genesis 4:3-15):

Enoch (Genesis 5:21-24):

Noah (Genesis 6:9-7:22):

Abraham (Genesis 12:1-5; 21:1-7; 22:1-19):

Isaac (Genesis 27:1-39):

Jacob (Genesis 48:8-22):

Joseph (Genesis 50:24-26):

Heroes of the Faith:

Your student does not need to do this exercise for all of the names and verses listed; let them choose how many they want to do, but encourage them to at least look at three or four. Also they will probably need your help in understanding the link between faith and the action taken in the verses for some of the more difficult selections. Encourage your students to do at least one of the more difficult ones, and use this opportunity to discuss the difference between a faith that is active in guiding one's life and a lifeless, ineffective faith. See faith and works in James 2:14-26 ; Philippians 2:12-13 and other passages.

Moses' parents (Exodus 2:1,2):

Moses (Exodus 2:11-15; 12:31-33; 12:1-16):

Israelites (Exodus 13:17-14:31):

Joshua- Walls of Jericho (Joshua 5:13-6:27):

Rahab (Joshua 2:1-24):

How does the Bible define faith? How do the examples in the Bible demonstrate for us faith in God? Why is faith important for us? Discuss these questions with your parents.

When we ask questions such as this one ("what do you think" questions), there is no right or wrong answer. Encourage your student that what they think is important, even if they don't believe they have the "right" answer. This will be another opportunity for discussion about what your student believes. (There will be MANY opportunities for discussion with them through the course of this curriculum!)



Section 2: The foundations of faith

A lot of people believe in a lot of different things; some people have faith in other religious beliefs, like Judaism (the Jewish religion) or Islam (the Muslim religion). Others believe in things like ghosts, witchcraft, or reincarnation— not exactly organized religions, but still significantly different beliefs from Christianity.

It is very important that we understand why our faith is valid, and why it is believable. In getting this understanding, we'll also begin to see why other religious beliefs do not have as much foundation as Christianity.

Read Matthew 7:24-27. What do these verses say about the importance of a strong foundation for faith?

What do you think makes Christianity a faith with a strong foundation?

A strong foundation:

Talk with your students about other religions (and non-religious sects and cults), and discuss with them the important differences between those beliefs and Christianity. We have a number of resources on other religions, cults and philosophies that we will be glad to help you use in this way. This section should be more discussion and thought-processing than some of the others.



Section 3: The Bible— a strong foundation

The Bible is the foundation for Christianity— and it is a strong one. As Christians, we give the Bible a lot of attention and emphasis, because of what we believe about it.

What do we believe about the Bible? List some things that you think Christians believe about the Bible.

What does the Bible say about itself? Look up the following sets of verses, and write down what you understand them to be saying.

Leviticus 1:1-17:

Deuteronomy 18:18,19; 31:9-13:

Jeremiah 1:1-19:

II Thessalonians 2:13:

II Timothy 3:14,17:

II Peter 3:16:

The Bible—our foundation:

Since the Bible is so important to Christianity and its foundation, it is very important that your student come away from this section with a very strong and clear grasp of the Bible's validity. Please make sure to discuss these concepts extensively with your student. Also, you might make them aware of some of the writings and other resources available to them for their understanding of this concept. R.C. Sproul's audio tape series *Hath God Said?* is an excellent resource, as is Josh McDowell's *Evidence that Demands a Verdict* and a handful of other books and tapes. These resources may not be appropriate for the age group your student is currently in, but they may be useful for your explanation of this material, or for your student at a later point. It is important that your student understand that such resources are available to them.

What does Jesus say about the Bible? Look up the following sets of verses, and write down what you understand them to be saying.

Matthew 5:18; 24:35:

John 10:35:



Section 4: The Bible, part 2

In the Church, we talk about the whole Bible being inspired by God, and about the Bible being infallible, or “not able to fail.” This means that the writing of every part of the Bible is inspired by, or directed by, God. God gave His words to the human authors so that when they wrote the books that make up the Bible, they wrote only what God wanted them to write, and they wrote everything God wanted them to write. This also means that, like God, the Bible is not able to fail — what it says is never wrong, and it is always everything that needs to be said. The Bible, as God’s word, is all that we need for our growth and development as Christians.

Discuss These Questions With Your Parents:

How do we know that the whole Bible is inspired by God?

Students should understand that the Bible is inspired by God, and that the influence of man on its content is absent. There is no part of what we call the Bible today –the 66 books of the Old and New Testaments – that was added outside of God’s control, nor is there anything that is missing from his complete Word. Although they were not taking dictation, the men who wrote the Bible were used of God to express precisely what He desired.

How do we know that the Bible is infallible— unable to fail?

Students should understand how the Holy Spirit made certain (and continues to make certain) that the Bible, in the original texts, contains no mistakes. God cannot lie, and His Word therefore could contain only truth.

What is the Bible useful for in our lives? How can we use the Bible to understand God?

You may want to discuss the origins of the Bible with your students. If so, the church can help you with resources to explain the canon and its foundation.

Why do we consider the Bible to be a solid foundation for our faith? What do you believe about the Bible?



Section 5: How God relates to us

Everyone is in a relationship with God. There is no one that you know, and no one in the world, who does not have a relationship with God. Here's the key question: is each relationship a right relationship, or a wrong one? Your relationship with God is important, and you should know whether or not it is a right or wrong relationship.

What makes a relationship with God a right relationship? That's a good question. The answer is in the Bible—that is part of why it is important that we understand the value and truth of the Bible. If what the Bible says is true, then what the Bible says about our relationship with God is also true. So what does the Bible say about our relationship with God?

Begin with Romans 1:18-32. What does this text say about man, and how man and God relate?

Man's wayward path:

On this page we begin to discuss man, and the fall of man. It significant for your student to understand that they are sinners, and like all other people they are sinful even if they were somehow able to "do no wrong".

What things do you know about yourself, and others, that affects your relationship with God according to these verses?

It is also important to discuss sins of omission - that is, failing to do all that is required of us, such as worshipping God – as well as sins of commission - that is, things that we do that are not right.

Read Genesis chapter 3. How did the world get this way?

You might begin with a discussion about the fall and original sin – but make sure that your student understands that because Adam was a divinely appointed representative; he represented you and your student and all others, and that all are sinful because of it.

In what condition do we say that the world is, because of these verses? What parts of the world are not considered to be in this condition?

Ownership of sin is the first and most important step to certainty of a valid faith. The Westminster Shorter Catechism may again prove a valuable resource for this discussion, especially questions # 39, 82, and 84.



Lesson 1 Summary

We've come a long way this week! Let's look back over what we've learned and write down a few summaries about it.

What is Faith? Of the "heroes of the faith," who did you learn the most from? Why?

Why is it important to have a strong foundation for our faith? What is that foundation?

What two words do we use to describe the Bible? What do they mean? How do we know that these words accurately describe the Bible?

What condition is the world in right now? Why is it in that condition? Does man know that God exists?

Let's memorize a verse from the Bible to close this week out: it's one of the ones that you looked up during your study. Memorize II Timothy 3:16.

Lesson 2: Understanding Your Faith

Up Close and Personal

In this lesson, we'll look at different things about your own faith, and the faith of other people that you know, like your parents or other members of the church. We'll continue to talk about the world we live in, and how God relates to it. We'll also look at the basics of the Gospel, and discuss salvation, which is the result of the faith that we discussed last week.

Section 1: God's relationship to the world, continued: God's righteousness

Man is sinful—that is, he is not able to always do everything that is good and right. Remember in section 5 last week, we talked about how the whole world is “fallen” and is affected by sin, and how all people are considered sinful or unable to do what is right. How does this change how we relate to God? Let's find out.

Read Genesis 2:15-17. What did God command? What did Adam do, in spite of God's command?

What would happen if God did not keep His word? Would God be a god who we could trust? What must happen in response to Adam's disobedience if God is to remain “just”—that is, trustworthy?

Read Romans 6:23. Is the same thing true for us today? What are “wages?” What wages have you, and everyone around you, earned?

God's Justice

Here you will return to the trustworthiness of God's word— and consequently, the absolute need for some form of punishment for those who do not keep His commands. You will also review the idea of sin, particularly your student's sin, and how they are guilty, deserving the “wages of sin”. Again, be sure to emphasize the truth and reality of this as a personal thing, not simply as something we learn about in Sunday School in a generic way. As always, you will find the Westminster Shorter Catechism a useful resource in covering this material. WSC questions 13-19.



Section 2: God's relationship to the world, part 3: mercy and grace

Man is sinful, and deserving of adequate punishment. God is just and trustworthy, and therefore must punish man. But God, in His great love for us, had a plan full of mercy and grace—a plan for our salvation. These are concepts we will focus on today.

What is “mercy?” Discuss this with your parents. What does the word mean? How do we see it in God's plan for our salvation? Read John 3:16-18, and 3:36. How does God maintain both mercy and justice?

Mercy & Grace

It is important for your student to realize the significance of both mercy – not receiving what we deserve – and grace – getting what we do not deserve – and understanding the differences between the two. Make sure that your student is aware that neither mercy nor grace is a result of what they do, but is completely a work of God's kindness and love toward us.

What is “grace?” Discuss this word with your parents. How do we see God's grace in Jesus? How do mercy and grace work together for our salvation?

Jesus our atonement:

Jesus had four things that enabled him to be a sufficient atonement for our sin: He was God in the flesh, He lived a sinless life, He died as a sacrifice for us, and He was resurrected that our sacrifice would be a living atonement. These are difficult concepts, and it is important that your student begin to understand their importance in his salvation. Check the WCF chapter 8 and WSC questions 21-28 for more help!

Talk about Jesus, and who he was, with your parents. Why was Jesus the only one who could provide salvation for us? What four things about Jesus' life are needed for that salvation to be complete?



Section 3: Jesus OUR salvation

So, God in His wisdom and love provided a way for man to be saved from His judgment. But, in order for that to happen, there must be an identification with Jesus—we must be adopted into the family of God. If we have faith in God, we will have these things. These two concepts—identification and adoption—will be our topic for this section.

Read Matthew 27:3-5. What does Judas do in this passage? Is what Judas did enough for salvation in Jesus Christ?

Our own salvation:

Perhaps the most difficult part of understanding salvation, especially with a covenant child who has grown up in the church, is the need for a personal identification with the work of Christ on the cross. The focus of this section is to help your student understand this.

Now read Mark 14:66-72. What was the difference between Peter's response to his own sin and Judas' response? What do we call the response that Peter had? Have you made a similar response for your own sin? Describe that response.

Repentance

True repentance is not just acknowledging sin like Judas, but it involves grief and sorrow over sin like Peter. However, they should also know that true repentance is a work in the heart by God's hand, and is not something that they can accomplish apart from Him.

Read Galatians 2:20. Discuss this verse with your parents. Do you understand identification with Jesus Christ? Do you have a similar identification as what the apostle Paul describes here? Describe your identification with Jesus Christ.

Identification

Your student needs to recognize his bond with Christ in a similar way that Paul acknowledges his. Identifying themselves with Christ and realizing that they therefore live for Him is a key part of living faith.

Now read John 1:12-13. Discuss the idea of “believing in him” with your parents. Do you have the right to be called a child of God? What does this mean for you?

Adoption

Help your students realize their membership in the family of God; part of this is simply encouragement as they prepare to join the church.

Also, by this point you should have an idea of whether your student has a genuine, credible profession of faith. If he does not, please do not proceed with him/her through the rest of this book without discussing it with an elder or member of the church staff. This is very important for the nurturing of his/her faith.



Section 4: What is a testimony?

The word “testimony” is a legal term used by lawyers and in courts. It means “evidence” or “a statement given under oath.” When someone has seen something happen that is against the law, they are asked to give testimony about what they saw.

We use the idea of a testimony in the church, too. When someone has seen God at work, then their description of that work is their testimony. A lot of people talk about what they have learned from reading the Bible recently, or about something that they learned from a sermon or Sunday School lesson— those are testimonies. Some people will describe how God has changed their heart about something or someone— that is a testimony.

All Christians have a testimony; if a person has the identification with Jesus Christ that we talked about in the last section— if they have been adopted into the family of God—then they can give testimony to how God was at work in their lives in this way. This testimony is an account of salvation, a description of how a person came to understand that Jesus is their Savior and Lord.

Do you have a testimony? In the last section we discussed how you know if you are a Christian—how to know if you have been adopted into God’s family. If you know that you are a Christian, then you have a testimony. This is an important thing to have—you will be asked to give testimony to your salvation in Jesus Christ in order to join the church. We’ll spend the rest of this section and all of the next discussing your testimony.

What is your testimony? Discuss with your parents each of the following topics:

- What is your understanding of your need for salvation?
- When did you first understand this need?
- What have you done in response to your understanding of this need for salvation?
- Do you believe that God is at work in your life?
- What are you doing to help your faith to grow?
- What are you doing to put your faith into action?

Make notes here:

Your student’s testimony:

Once you are confident of a real and living faith present in your student’s life, help him/her understand how he/she can communicate his testimony to others. This section and the next are designed to help you with that. Make sure they know that there is not a particular format or manner in which they must write it, but simply that they have something to assist them with understanding how to communicate it.



Section 5: Your testimony

It is helpful to have your testimony written down in some form so that if or when you need to remind yourself of God's work in your life, you can do that easily. Your written testimony does not need to be in any special format: you do not need to worry about correct grammar or complete sentences. You can write it as an "outline" or as a poem if you want to, or you can just write it as a letter to yourself or someone else. The important thing is that you try to write it out.

Write out your testimony here.



Lesson 2 Summary

What does it mean for God to be just?

How does God show mercy and grace to us? What significant thing do we have because of that?

What does it mean to have “identification” with Jesus Christ?

How do people become adopted into the family of God?

What is a testimony? Why is it important to understand yours?

This week's memory verse: 2 Corinthians 5:21