

The following responses to “*Frequently Asked Questions*” are suggestions, not laws. You are free to do what you feel is in the best interest of the group and for its participants. But keep in mind that these responses and recommendations are intended to produce a spiritually vibrant relational community that is designed to produce devoted followers of Jesus. It is our conviction that agreeing upon and *signing* a covenant, a “sworn friendship”, is the optimum way to approach spiritual community, one that produces the best results and the most satisfactory personal and group experience.

### 1. How does “Let your ‘yes’ be ‘yes’ and your ‘no’ ‘no’” apply to the case of signing a covenant with one another? (Matthew 5:37 [see commentary below] ; James 5:12)

If we Christians (mostly) think having and signing an official marriage certificate is important, even essential, why wouldn't we use the same logic when it comes to other high-significance agreements, like a Covenant of Spiritual Friendship? *Both* declare at the outset that the parties involved are serious and committed to the enterprise they are embarking on. It is a bold statement that establishes and reinforces the BASIS OF TRUST. It says: “I am *fully* into this, and I am in it (by God's grace and power) *come what may.*” We say “yes” with our mouths *and* our pens.

The point is clear: oaths should be used with caution before God. Our primary focus should be on becoming people who live with authenticity and honesty, not people who casually make promises we don't or won't keep. We should take very seriously Jesus' admonition against using oaths flippantly. Mark Driscoll, <http://pastormark.tv/2012/04/12/tough-text-thursday-matthew-5-3337>

What is Jesus teaching here? Beloved, I believe He is simply reasserting the Old Testament standard. What was it? Two things govern oaths: don't use them frivolously, but only for special occasions; and only swear by the name of God. John MacArthur, <http://www.gty.org/Resources/Sermons/2222>

### 2. What precedents are there in signing a covenant?

See Session 8 for two biblical examples of covenant. Marriage covenants are signed. We sign a variety of voluntary contracts all the time. We sign car leases, mortgages, banking agreements, employment contracts, and many other relationally regulating/guiding commitments.

### 3. What if I/we don't agree with every part of the suggested covenant?

Bring up your concerns to the group. Suggest an alternative to what is written. Re-write the covenant in a way that *everyone* in your group can agree upon. Then commit to *that*.

### 4. Can we write our own group covenant?

Absolutely. In fact, it is recommended. The process of determining what should and shouldn't be included is highly valuable. (It would be best to not look at the recommended covenant before wrestling through the creation of your own group covenant.)

### 5. Why do you use the term “covenant”? Are there other terms that could be used?

We use the term *covenant* because it is a biblical word and because it is a weighty word that carries the force and gravity of serious commitment and devotion. Other words you could consider are: *oath*, *vow*, *promise*, *commitment*, and *resolution*.

### 6. What if I “just don't feel comfortable” signing the covenant?

That's probably a good sign; you *shouldn't* feel comfortable. You should feel stretched, challenged, reflective, and understandably somewhat hesitant. A serious commitment of this kind should cause one to count the cost *as well* as the extraordinary benefits prior to signing.

### 7. What if I don't *trust myself* to keep the covenant?

Ah, here is someone who has lived long enough with their own shortcomings to know that she will certainly fall short in fulfilling the covenant. Truth is, no one has ever, or can ever, keep all aspects of the covenant all the time. (Very much like wedding vows, right?) But anyone can keep the covenant. To *keep* the covenant is to not *lose* it, to never lose sight of it, to never put it away, to keep returning to the whole of it when you have been unfaithful to a part of it. In that sense, the covenant keeps you! It draws you back to itself so you will renew your understanding of its purpose (and benefits) and so commit to it again.

### 8. What if I don't *trust someone else* in the group to keep the covenant?

Extend the same grace to others that you would hope to receive from them, and from God. They, like you, will fail in some way. This is where you must put your faith in God, rather than in another person. Trust that God will bring your sister to greater maturity, and over time increase your confidence in them so you can trust them with your words and your life.

### 9. What if not everyone wants to sign the covenant?

It's everyone or no one. If one or two don't want to sign, then honestly discuss their reasons together. (Note: See if their concerns are addressed in the other FAQ's here.) Discern between the following:

- a) *I'm Not Willing*: If the honest reason is an unwillingness to commit to this extent, then this is not the group for her (or the time for her). Freely release her from any obligation without even a hint of guilt or shame. Show grace. Trust God that He has another plan (another group? another time?) for her. Thank her for her contribution and bless her as she goes. Treat her with the utmost respect whenever you see her.
- b) *I'm Not Quite Ready*: If the honest reason is that she feels a little more time is required, then decide as a group if you are all willing to wait until an agreed-upon time to come back to the matter of signing the covenant. Your group should ask what the extra time might do to help this person conclude that this covenant is a good idea for her and for the others in her group.

But DO NOT compromise the potential for authentic, highly committed, biblical community for those who do not choose it. Experience has shown that those groups who sign a covenant (as a basis for loyal spiritual friendships) go deeper and go longer with one another than those who don't.

### 10. What should we do when someone does something to breach the covenant?

This is a great question. Let's respond with a question: (If you're married) What do you do when *you* breach some part of your marriage covenant? Or better, when your spouse does? You talk honestly about it. You show each other grace and forgiveness. What do you do when you breach your salvation covenant? God shows you grace. So why not use the same biblical, grace-soaked, truth-filled, love-motivated words and ways with your group? ***We should all be of one mind and be sympathetic, loving as brothers and sisters, compassionate, and humble.*** <sup>1Peter 3:8</sup> Here are some suggestions:

- Pray for wisdom, grace, and for God to reveal anything in your own life that must first be repented of and where forgiveness needs to be sought.
- Express your concerns honestly and with a tone of grace. (Remember: It is possible the one who breaches the covenant may not be aware that they have done so, or at least they might not be aware how it has affected you and the group.)
- Express (in "I" terms, not "you" terms) how this has affected you and/or the group... how it hurt you; how it made you feel disrespected or undervalued; how it impacts your ability to trust completely; how it makes you feel "unsafe" in this group; etc.
- If the offence is to you personally, then go to the person one-on-one to convey your thoughts, feelings and misgivings. If, however, the whole group is affected, then you *may* want to bring it up within the group. But there must be no (public) shaming.
- Utilize the exhortation methods and means learned in Session 6 of Launch. Use Matthew 18 as your guideline.
- DO NOT let it go unaddressed; this will lead to resentment and the forming of a root of bitterness which will do grave harm to your own heart and to the spirit of community in your group.
- If she repents, then forgive her—completely (because there is no other way to forgive).
- If she does not repent: Pray for God to speak to her and to you and to the group members; re-evaluate whether your accusations are accurate and substantiated; if, after some time, repentance is not forthcoming, you may have to ask her to leave the group.
- Remember that *reconciliation* is the primary and immediate goal; *resolution* is not essential in that you may have to "agree to disagree" on non-essentials while showing grace and love.